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AROUND THEATRES

BY

MAX BEERBOHM

VOLUME II

NEW YORK
ALFRED·A·KNOPF
1930

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AROUND THEATRES

THE OLDER AND BETTER MUSIC HALL

November 14, 1903.

"An octogenarian in the hunting-field" is the title of annual paragraphs in the daily press. Annually one reflects that "an octogenarian in bed" were better news. One may be wrong. There are men incapable even of growing old—men so insignificant that Time overlooks them. Let such men pursue foxes even to the brinks of their own graves. As with the body, so with the mind. There are they who never cease to be intellectually receptive. A new idea, or a new movement, appears in their senile course, and lightly they "take" it, undaunted by the five bars or so, and gallop on. One admires them as showy exceptions to the law of nature. But one knows that they could not be so receptive if in their youth and prime they had ever deeply understood, or felt strongly, anything. They are shallow, and they are cynics, these genial old souls. What shall be said of those others who, having long ago exhausted their curiosity and keenness, do yet, in sheer vanity, pretend themselves keen and curious? How graceless an eld is theirs! See them riding to the meet, laced and stayed to a semblance of jauntiness! See them furtively leading their horses through the gaps, and piping, at last, a husky "view holloa" over the fallen fox! (Any reader who is also a sportsman will amend my metaphor if it is wrong.) Such impostors deserve no mercy from us. To us the prejudices of eld are sacred, and should be yet more sacred to their holders. I, for one, in the fulness of time, shall make no secret of them. I am too closely in touch with things now, too glad and eager, to be elastic in the dim future, and as for pretending to be elastic . . . no! I

look forward to a crabbed and crusty old age. I mean to be a scourge of striplings.

The history of a keen soul in relation to a live art falls usually into three parts: (1) The soul lives in the future, the art lagging behind. (2) The soul lives in the present, the art having caught it up. (3) The soul lives in the past, left behind by the art. My soul, in relation to dramatic art, is still in its first stage. (Or rather, dramatic art, in relation to my soul, is still in its first stage. For the soul itself is always static.) So far as the theatre is concerned, I am still a beckoner, a "progressive". But in the matter of music halls, I am already a staunch, even a passionate, reactionary—not a beckoner, but a tugger-back. There never was a time when the music halls lagged behind my soul. To me, as stripling, they seemed perfectly delightful. I dislike the fashion that now dominates not merely the specific "palaces of varieties" but also such places as the Pavilion, the Tivoli, and even that titular home of lost causes and impossible loyalties, the Oxford. The stripling reader tries politely to repress a sneer. Let him sneer outright. I can justify my prejudice. I may be old-fashioned, but I am right. The music-hall entertainment ought to be stupid, as surely as the drama ought to be intelligent. In every human creature is a mixture of stupidity and cleverness, and for both qualities we need nutrition. How can we satisfy our cleverness in a music hall? What comes to us but a sense of confusion and fatigue from the fashionable gallimaufry of clever poodles, clever conjurers, clever acrobats, clever cinematographs, clever singers and clever elephants? No good can be done to the intellect where no mental effort can be sustained and concentrated. A music hall, by its inherent nature precludes such good. On the other hand, it can appeal very pleasantly to the stupid, or sensuous, side of us. It did this in the good old days, when there was an unbroken succession of singers, alternate males and females, each singing a couple of songs written and composed in accord to certain

traditional conventions. We did not come away wiser and better men; but an inward unity in the entertainment had formed for us a mood. All those so similar songs were merged into our senses, pleasing and amusing, subtly sedative, warm. That old lilt in the veins of us—how bitterly we miss it! Even such songs as are still sandwiched in at the modish halls have lost all their charm. Patter leaves but a corner to tune. Like many other men of original genius, Mr. Dan Leno broke the form provided for his expression. We gladly barter tune for a full sense of so delightful a personality and so accomplished an actor as Mr. Dan Leno. But the others, the imitators, do not make good our loss. Clever they are, more or less, but we—we who are not of a generation that knows no better—would gladly sacrifice their cleverness in return for straightforward tunes.

Can we anywhere recapture the olden pleasure? Indeed, yes. I have found a place. Let me guide you to it. Half way up the Edgware Road we come to a very signally illuminated building. Nothing could seem more brand-new than the front of this Metropolitan Music Hall; but enter, and you will be transported, deliciously, into the past. The system of ventilation is quite perfect, yet the atmosphere is the atmosphere of a decade since. Look, listen!

> "If *you* don't trouble trouble
> Trouble doesn't trouble *you,*
> So don't—you—worry over me!"

Is it—no—yes—it must be—it *is* Mr. Harry Freeman. That simple, jolly, straightforward singer, dancing as he sings—how long is it since we saw him? We tremble lest he have truckled to changing fashion. Not he! No patter: just a short, sharp phrase uttered through the music between the chorus and the next verse —no more. A thousand memories sweep back to us from that beaming face under the grey bowler hat. That face radiates the

whole golden past, and yet, oddly enough, seems not a day older than when last we looked on it. We—we have changed. Our taste, however, is as of yore, and we always did delight in Mr. Harry Freeman. We beat time to his familiar music. We sit again at his ever-moving feet. He always was a philosopher, in his way. He was always a Stoic. A Stoic he remains. As of yore, he is overwhelmed with misfortune. Fate still smites him hip and thigh. He has just been robbed by one man and knocked down by another. His home has been broken up. He has been recently in prison. But

"If *you* don't trouble trouble
Trouble doesn't trouble *you*,"

and no sympathy is craved by this joyous dancer. The attitude has a more than personal significance. Not long ago, Mr. Arthur Symons wrote an essay about the very thoroughfare whose inhabitants Mr. Freeman is now delighting. He suggested that the dominant characteristic of these inhabitants was a dull acquiescence in the sordidness of their lives. Acquiescent they are, but not dully so. Mr. Symons, very naturally, cannot imagine a man leading with pleasure their kind of life. They who have to lead it, however, take it as a matter of course, and are quite cheerful about it. They are, in fact, Stoics. This is one of the advantages of the old music hall over the new: it does reflect, in however grotesque a way, the characters of the class to which it consciously appeals. And so, after all, accidentally, one gets from it a mental stimulus. . . . Who is this vast man in evening dress? A "Lion Comique"? Not quite that. But something contemporaneous: a "Basso Profondo". He urges us to tak' the high road; he himself is going to tak' the low road. Loch Lomon', in 1903! Delightful! . . . And here is a "Serio", with the true Serionian voice and method:

"Do not complain,
I'll single remain,
Of sweethearts I want no other."

The gallery-boys take the chorus from her, and she sways silently from side to side in measure to the waltz, smiling the smile of triumph. Comes a "Burlesque Actress", dressed daringly. The diamonds flash, but the heart is in the right place, and the song is about some one whose

"Sweet face so glad
Brings smiles to the sad."

Comes a "Comedienne". She strikes a rather more modern note. There is, according to her, one, and only one, way of putting the War Office on a sound basis, and that is the instant instalment of Sir Redvers Buller. The audience unanimously endorses her scheme, and she is, no doubt, right; but we regret the introduction of any names that were not names to conjure with in our boyhood: they are anachronisms here. Mr. Harry Randall, with his patter, is another anachronism. Several other turns, admirable though they are, we could spare also, for that they interrupt in us the luxurious development of the true music-hall mood.

But, certainly, the Metropolitan is a great discovery. Let us go to it often, magically renewing there our youth. And in those dreary other halls let us nevermore set foot.

"THE LOWER DEPTHS"

December 5, 1903.

Lately I was writing harshly about the English people's contempt for the things of the mind. But I think I prefer that stolid contempt to the gushing superficial curiosity evinced in certain little private circles. The attitude which may be called "the literary tea-party attitude" seems to me of all attitudes the most dreadful. I will examine it for you—a painful duty—as soon as the season of good will is past. I am sure that in recent months the properest topic of conversation at literary tea-parties, or rather the properest means of initiating those brief and frantic little conversations into which the guests at literary tea-parties plunge as though they had something worth saying, and as though there were something worth hearing, has been Maxim Gorki. Gorki! I hear the tinkling of those tea-spoons. I catch the echoes of those fatuously earnest questions, those fatuously playful answers. Gorki, Gorki! But never for long do these initiatory topics reign supreme. They come and go, yielding place to others, very quickly. Sharp's the word, in that flighty and fickle kingdom. Gorki, I wager is gone already. The last, so far as literary tea-parties are concerned, was heard of him at the beginning of this week, when the Stage Society produced "The Lower Depths". The attendants at literary tea-parties are not, as a rule, readers of books. Reviews of books are more to their taste. But they do, one and all of them, attend the productions of the Stage Society. And the dose administered on Sunday evening and on Monday afternoon will have sufficed to purge their minds

of Gorkism. I strain my ears to catch the succeeding topic. I am sure there is one.

To no habitual reader of these articles need I explain that I am all for relaxing the girths of modern drama. The modern technique is much too tight, in my opinion. The difficulty of writing a technically good play is such that the best men prefer other modes of self-expression, and the task of play-writing falls mostly to duffers who, having nothing to express, have time and patience to master the needful (but not essentially needful) little tricks. Any sign, therefore, of a movement towards looser form is always sped very heartily by me. But looseness of form is one thing, formlessness is another. Such devices as prologues, and epilogues, and scenes of mere conversation, are all quite defensible, quite commendable. But the line must be drawn somewhere, and drawn a long way before we come down to "The Lower Depths" of Gorki. There must be some kind of artistic unity—unity either of story or of idea. There must be a story, though it need not be stuck to like grim death; or there must be, with similar reservation, an idea. Gorki has neither asset. At any rate he does nothing with either asset. Enough that he gives us, honestly and fearlessly, "a slice of life"? Enough, certainly, if he did anything of the kind. But he doesn't. "The Lower Depths" is no "slice". It is chunks, hunks, shreds and gobbets, clawed off anyhow, chucked at us anyhow. "No thank you" is the only possible reception for such work. We are not at all squeamish. But we demand of the playwright who deals with ugly things, just as we demand of the playwright who deals with pretty things, something more than the sight of his subject-matter. Mere gall is no better than mere sugar. It is worse. Mere sugar is not disgusting. Nor is gall disgusting if it be rightly prepared. In other words, horrible subject-matter ceases to be horrible when it is treated by a fine artist. The subject-matter of a tragedy is, in itself, necessarily horrible. Some tragedies are horrible. These are the bad

tragedies, ungraced by any beauty or nobility of treatment, or ungraced by an idea, and so meaning nothing, leading nowhither, merely affronting us with their own horrors. Æsthetic pain or pleasure depends not at all on the artist's material: it does depend, entirely, on the artist. A convenient proof of this law may be made through comparison of "The Lower Depths" with another foreign play, "The Good Hope", which the Stage Society produced in its past season. Heijermans, its author, had taken a not less ghastly theme than Gorki's. Fisher-folk doomed to starve or to sacrifice their lives for the enrichment of an unscrupulous ship-owner are not less ghastly a theme than are drink-sodden wastrels in a "night refuge". But Heijermans had an idea, and this idea he expressed, very beautifully, through a coherent story. He evoked, through art, a sense of pity and awe; and so he sent us away happy, despite our very real indignation that in real life such things should be. I would willingly subscribe something to any "fund for the amelioration of the condition of Dutch fishermen". But, also, I cherish the memory of a delightful afternoon. On the other hand, no "fund for the amelioration of the condition of wastrels in Moscow" would extract from me a brass farthing. I am not interested in them. I may become so, in the future. I shall become so, if some Russian artist arise and handle well the theme which Gorki has botched. If ever I meet Gorki, who is said to be an impressive person in real life, or if ever I read one of his books, which are said to be impressive, I shall be awakened doubtless, to a quick sympathy with Russian wastrels. But Gorki on the stage is merely a bore, and a disgusting bore. I dare say the characters in "The Lower Depths" are closely observed from life. But so are the figures in the lower depths of Madame Tussaud's quaint establishment. I defy you to leave the Chamber of Horrors a wiser and a better man, or a man conscious of an æsthetic impression. Where there is no meaning, no unity, nothing but bald and unseemly horror, you must needs be merely disgusted and

anxious to change the subject. It is just possible, as I have hinted, that Gorki may have meant to express some sort of an idea. Let us credit him with having meant to express a very noble idea. But that idea is not enubilable from the muzzy maunderings of the wastrels. They maunder muzzily on, these wastrels, just as they would in real life; but no ray is cast from without on their darkness. There is an old man, who appears suddenly, and in whom we dimly descry a "raisonneur". But he disappears, not less suddenly, leaving behind him no lesson except a vague sentimental optimism. This lack of any underlying idea would not matter if there were any narrative unity. An artist has the right to tell a story without any criticism of its meaning. The story itself produces that artistic unity which, if there is no story, can be produced only by an underlying idea. But Gorki as story-teller is not less far to seek than Gorki as thinker. Two or three clumsy little bits of a story are wedged in here and there. But they have nothing to do with the play.

I wonder why the committee of the Stage Society had anything to do with it? To change the subject for literary tea-parties is hardly a great enough need to justify so difficult a production. Yet on no merely æsthetic ground could the thing have been deemed worth while. Snap-shot photographs are all very well in their way. But one keeps them in an album. One does not put them together into a large gilt frame. Such a frame one uses only for a large single painting. Gorki's work is to dramaturgy as snap-shot photographs are to the art of painting; and a proscenium (literally a gold frame) deserves something better than the misuse of being made to nullify such value as such work may have.

AN INQUIRY INTO A CONVENTION

December 19, 1903.

In the world, as the world appears to us through the medium of our best-beloved form of dramatic art, are many startling and mysterious creatures. But I think that of all the stock-figures in musical comedy none is so startling and mysterious as the young man of fashion. Our wonder at him is never blunted. Yet he is always the same. Always he wears the same vacuous face, into which a monocle is screwed. Always he utters, with the same drawl, the same jargon. Always he has no occupation, except the passive one of being attended by the same, or rather by a similar, bevy of girls. He addresses them collectively as "girls". He is "a bit chippy", but thinks it would be "awf'lly beastly jolly" if they would lunch with him at a restaurant which he names. (The name of the restaurant varies from year to year, and is the one thing that ever varies.) The "girls" seem to have a poor opinion of him, and make pert answers. "Oh, come now, I say, by Jove," he rejoins, "you're awf'lly beastly severe. Give a feller a chance." But I need not further describe his mannerisms and mode of life. We all know them by heart. Sometimes this young man of fashion cuts an amusing figure. Such actors as Mr. George Grossmith, the younger, and Mr. G. P. Huntley bring to the impersonation of him a quaint skill and humour. More often this young man of fashion is merely tedious. Tedious, except in his constant power to puzzle us. For whence came he? Where, in the actual world around us, are we to look for the like of him —to look for anything how faintly soever resembling him? Apparently, he is offered as a satire on an actual type. We send forth

experience and imagination, hand in hand, to follow up the clue.

Like to like; so perhaps in the surrounding stalls and boxes we shall find a stray solution? There are many authentic young men of fashion in the stalls and boxes. But sight of them does but thicken the plot. For instance, not one of them wears a monocle: that ornament is in these days peculiar to middle-age. Nor does the face of one of them betoken vacuity or languor. They all look quite alert and intelligent. Masks, perhaps? But wait until the entr'acte, circulate among them in the foyer, take notes of their conversation. Their elocution does not support your mask theory. They talk briskly, clearly, without affectation—a trifle loudlier, perhaps, than need be, but one has no other complaint to make. And the matter of their conversation, as apart from its manner? Well, they are not discussing the fundamental truths of the spirit. You catch mostly the names of ladies, of horses, of the various kinds of motor-cars, of electoral constituencies, and of stocks and shares. Many of these youths are on the Stock Exchange, assiduous brokers or jobbers. Others are in the House of Commons. Others are private secretaries. Others are in the Guards. Very few indeed of them have no definite occupation. You are struck by the strenuousness of their minds. The things they talk about may not be of the highest or deepest kind; but the talkers have their wits about them; and there is a very decent flow of shrewdness and humour. Mental ability is not safely gauged by height or depth of topic. The value of the thing said depends not on the value of the thing it is said about. We are compelled to rank higher the mind of the average young man of fashion than the mind of the average "intellectual" at those literary tea-parties which I lately mentioned here. Good sense about trivialities is better than nonsense about things that matter. Musical comedy, by the way, has not yet attempted to portray these "intellectuals". A painter, wearing a velveteen jacket, and singing as he paints the heroine with a mahl-stick, is the furthest point to which musical

comedy will venture from its accustomed area. And its occasional painter seems to us not less verisimilar than its constant young man of fashion.

How came the convention? Was it always quite fantastic, or was it once grounded on a fact that has slipped away? Let us try to trace it back. Musical comedy began only in the 'nineties, but this convention existed certainly before that decade. I can remember the burlesques of the later 'eighties, and in them was just the same young man of fashion that we know now. The only difference was that his interlocutors called him "chappie"—a name which, like its later equivalent, never had been heard except on the stage. He flourished, also, I am told, in the burlesques and farces of the 'seventies and 'sixties. His début appears to have been when Edward Sothern created the part of Lord Dundreary. In that dark age he wore "Piccadilly weepers"; but otherwise he was as now he is: he had the monocle, and the vacuity, and the whole bag of tricks. But, though Sothern first gave him to the stage, he had existed for some time in the pages of "Punch". It is likely that Sothern derived him not from life but from the drawings and legends of John Leech. Did Leech, in his turn, derive him from life? I think it likelier that Leech derived him from the pages of Thackeray. There the figure was, ready-made, in the person of the Marquis of Farintosh. We cannot trace him back any further than that; and we may assume that Thackeray was his creator. Did Thackeray draw this type from observation or from his own inner consciousness? There is nothing to show that in that period the average young man of fashion was a fool. The Georgian dandies had been no fools. They had been, on the contrary, wits. The graces of intellect had been cultivated by them hardly less than the physical graces. Their tradition was kept bright by their followers in the Early-Victorian epoch. Count d'Orsay was no fool. We may be sure that among the young dandies, to whom he gave laws, there was no cult for

fatuousness. Thackeray was not personally acquainted with them. He did not move in "the highest circles". Now, nothing can be so surely deduced from Thackeray's writings as that he would have liked to move constantly in those circles. He had a very real love for them. But whosoever loves the unattainable is bound to hate it also. The instinct of mankind against satire is really a very sound instinct. Satire is always dishonest. For it is always the expression of hatred for a thing hopelessly coveted. Who satirises humanity? None but he who, not having the common human advantages, is obsessed with admiration of them. Who satirises plutocracy? The pauper who is warmed by the notion of wealth. Who satirises aristocracy? The man who wishes he had been born an aristocrat. Thackeray wished that; and the Marquis of Farintosh was one of the natural outcomes of his wish. It must have pleased him to see this figment gradually accepted as a type. He may have had the further gratification of knowing that the figment reproduced itself as a fact. Art does often react on life, and it is quite possible that Farintosh, through Leech and Sothern, may have cropped up as a type in the actual world. But an extinct fact is as negligible as a figment.

"RUY BLAS"

February 20, 1904.

Transport yourself, in fancy, to Paris . . . It is a sunbright morning in Spring. You are in the Bois. The young leaves glitter so beneath the sun that everything seems to you unreal—refreshingly, deliciously unreal. You expand, you sparkle, you are greedy of impressions. You catch a faint distant sound that puzzles you. It comes a little nearer. You recognise it as the sound of a big drum; and anon is faintly audible its accompaniment of brass. Anon you can distinguish the notes of the "Marseillaise", and through the green trees you have glimpses of a steely cavalcade that is coming with the tune. Anon they are passing you, a company of Dragoons, prancing and caracoling past you, clattering and gleaming past you, aloft on their big chargers, with their big red plumes all a-nodding to the little green leaves, while the blood in your veins dances in time to the blaring and booming of the national hymn. Yes, you let yourself go. You are swept out of yourself. You forget that it is all quite unreal—a mere effect of the theatre, signifying nothing. Here, you would vow, are no supers against a backcloth, but real heroes among real trees. And you shout in correct French, at the risk of being arrested by yonder vigilant gendarme, the hope that the army may live.

Now transport yourself back into London. It is a raw wet afternoon. You are walking, under an umbrella, along Gower Street. Everything looks very real indeed. The area-railings, the brown bricks, the wire-blinds—there can be no doubt at all about them. You behold coming towards you, tramping slowly in the middle of the road, an unfamiliar procession. Who are these men? You

stand to watch them. They look highly respectable in their broadcloth, but very uncomfortable, mistrustful, gloomy. There is an air of Passive Resistance about them. Yet somehow they do not seem to be English. Swart are their faces, and their hair bristles in a distinctly Latin manner. Are they from Soho? "Nay," says a little voice at your elbow, "do you not remember them?" Looking down, you behold the good fairy who came to your christening. You tell her, curtly, that you have never seen anything like them before, and that you hope never to see anything like them again. "These," she pouts, "are the lovely soldiers you saw that morning in the Bois. I thought you would like to see them again. I thought it would cheer you up. So I wafted them hither. I think you might say 'thank you'." Mechanically you thank her. She is appeased. "Fancy," she cries, "your not recognising them! That is the fault of the bad fairy who was not invited to your christening. She vetoed the uniforms, and the horses, and the music, and the sunshine, and the green leaves. Wasn't it horrid of her? But it hasn't made any real difference, has it? These were the very men." She vanishes with a smile of satisfied benevolence. The good fairy, you reflect, always *was* a fool.

I suspect it is by the good fairy that "Ruy Blas" has been "wafted hither" for our delectation. All honour to her for her well-meaning; but even she might have had the sense to know that the bad fairy, inevitably intervening, would spoil all the fun. French dragoons, dismounted, and thrust into mufti, and unaccompanied by music, would be, at any rate, a not more depressing sight than the usual passengers through Gower Street. But a dramatic romance by Victor Hugo, with sober blank verse instead of its own intoxicated alexandrines, and with a cast of mimes who (for the most part) have neither the training nor the innate sense for the art of declamation, or for those beautiful extravagances of port and gesture which are of the essence of romantic acting—ah, show me where, in the whole range of our

depressing native drama, I need go in fear of a more depressing phenomenon than this! Strip a romance of its proper romantic trappings, and you behold but a "damned silly story"—a community of idiotic frogs trying to puff themselves to the semblance of bulls. It matters not at all whether Mr. John Davidson, adapting and abbreviating "Ruy Blas" for home consumption, have or have not made it less credible by this or that compression. The point is that he has transferred a wild and inflated lie from a plane where we could accept and revel in it to a plane where we must needs reject it with a yawn. I do not say that he could have done his work better. I do say that he ought not to have done it at all. His blank verse has many fine qualities. But it is blank verse —a medium for stateliness, grace, tenderness, sincerity and so forth, but no medium at all for the jolly headlong unreality and monstrosity of Hugoesque romance. Mr. Davidson might, at least, have preserved rhyme? No; rhymed decasyllabics are merely pretty, dainty—perhaps not even that, to our ears, through their degrading association with the annual pantomimes. He might have tried English Alexandrines? That would have been a doomed endeavour. The genius of our language forbids it. He might have invented some new rhymed measure? A waste of ingenuity. There is no means of truly conveying into English the spirit of "Ruy Blas", just as there is no possible synonym in our vocabulary for the word "panache." And so, avaunt, good fairy! No more of your kind intentions, we beseech you. Only by knowing the French language, and by seeing "Ruy Blas" in the original version, can we, solidly sentimental Anglo-Saxons, project ourselves into receptivity of this inspired balderdash.

MR. ALEXANDER'S COUP

March 26, 1904.

During the past week England has had one hero:—Mr. George Alexander. Like a water-spout from a smooth ocean, there has shot vertically up into the empyrean a sudden column of marble, with Mr. Alexander (blushing, doubtless; but I have no telescope) upon its capital, and with John Bull and Britannia labouring under strongest emotion around its plinth. Up, and ever up, flies the beaver of John Bull; down, and ever down, fall the tears of gentle Britannia; both these worthies feeling that there can be nothing much the matter with a world in which so brave and good a man as Mr. Alexander came to birth. A stranger from some less blest planet might ask what exactly Mr. Alexander had been doing—had he saved the State? had he endowed a national theatre? had he . . . No, stranger; you will never guess the undying deed of derring-do that has sent us and our newspapers rightly mad with wonder and adulation. Listen! Hold on to something, in case you should fall down. Now! On Thursday, 17 March, Mr. Alexander produced, at the S. James' Theatre, King Street, S. James', S.W., a play entitled "Love's Carnival", being an English version of Otto Erich Hartleben's play entitled, "Rosenmontag". On Saturday, 19 March (steady, lad, steady!) Mr. Alexander withdrew the production.

At first sight, this great renouncement seems all the more grandly brave for that it is somewhat un-English. The Englishman never knows when he is beaten. Who first made this remark I cannot trace. Evidently, he was some sneering foreigner. But the Englishman never knows when he is being sneered at. It is

an idiosyncrasy in him to take every sneer as a more or less obvious compliment. "A hypocrite? Well", he smiles, "I grant them I have the appearance of virtue, and so must seem hypocritical to *them*. But why should I dissemble my virtue? I am not ashamed of it." "Perfidious? I am certainly far-seeing—devilish subtle and diplomatic, as they know to their cost." "A shopkeeper? I have a genius for finance." "A glutton? None of your kickshaws for *me*." "Intemperate? There is no beer like British beer, and no whisky like Scotch." "A snob? I have, it is true, a sense of proportion in social as in all other matters." "Gloomy? I am, thank Heaven, no fribble." In like manner, incapacity to realise defeat is attributed by the Englishman to strength of character, not to anything in the way of stupidity, and seems to him a very admirable thing indeed. Thus, one would expect him rather to despise the acumen of Mr. Alexander. But here one must take into reckoning another of his idiosyncrasies. He loves, above all things, a failure. Mr. Cunninghame Graham, not long ago, wrote a beautiful essay in praise of failure; and people thought this a very eccentric thing to have done, for they regard Mr. Graham as a generally eccentric man, and they always do refer everything that a man says or writes to their general notion of him. As a matter of fact, Mr. Graham was only expressing a sentiment in which the whole of England is steeped through and through. In England nothing so endears a man to his fellows as a good, straightforward, downright, deadly failure. In the South African war, the General who was acclaimed with the truest enthusiasm was he who seemed to have fallen most signally short. How different from any other country in Europe, where the unsuccessful General is hounded down as a malefactor! This preference is, perhaps, a rather loveable trait in Englishmen. Or it may be merely an offshoot of egoism and envy—preference for men who do not rise above the common level of mediocrity. Anyhow, there the feeling is. And on it

MR. ALEXANDER'S COUP

Mr. Alexander has gone Nap. He produced a play that was not very favourably received (few plays are) on the first night. And forthwith he snatched the opportunity of saddling himself with a fiasco. It was the stroke of a master-mind. And I offer to Mr. Alexander my heartiest congratulations on his cleverness, not in knowing when he is beaten, but in pretending to be beaten when he isn't. For, as he confessed (rather indiscreetly) to the representative of a daily paper, he might easily have run the play to good business for at least six weeks. But he knew a trick worth two of that, and off the play came ingloriously. Gloriously, before the eyes of a public whose delight at having been so quickly deferred to is outdone by their joy in a man who has failed so signally, and by their admiration for his marvellous courage and his sweet humility in confessing himself crushed. In the general uproar, I pause to shed a tear over poor Herr Otto Erich Hartleben, who might, but for Mr. Alexander's happy thought, have been going to draw pleasant fees "for at least six weeks". I hope he will have enough pride to return the miserable three-night cheque which Mr. Alexander will have posted to him.

From time to time, one hears dark hints of "organised opposition" on first nights. I wonder if Mr. Alexander himself, the other night, had—no, it would have been unnecessary. You can always count on a fairly hostile demonstration against a play that ends sadly. And "Love's Carnival" had not merely a sad ending: it was tedious throughout. My belief in the skill of Mr. Alexander, as manager, does, however, drive me to the conclusion that the withdrawal of the play was not a sudden happy thought, but an end for which he had been secretly working. Such is his skill in management that he could not possibly have expected a real success for "Love's Carnival". "Six weeks", perhaps, it might have had; but not more than that—not enough to have induced him, in the ordinary course of business, to try it on. Had success been his objective, he would not have followed "Old Heidelberg"

with a play of exactly the same local colour. German uniforms and German beer would have had a well-earned rest. Nor was "Love's Carnival" a play which could, like "Old Heidelberg", be transplanted without becoming unintelligible. The persons of it were not persons behaving in a generally human way. So far as they were real at all, they were but locally real. Except under the code of the German army, persons do not behave as they did. (What a pleasant sensation it is to be writing of a dull play, for once, in the past tense!) And the British public knows nothing about that code, and cannot make allowances for its effect. Thus the play was bound to seem unreal to the British public. Even to German residents in England it was bound to seem unreal, for another reason. The plot of it was just that which even our worst novelettists have outgrown. A youth loved, and was loved, truly. Both he and she were poor. Well-meaning wicked people determined to part them, and told each that the other was faithless, and each believed the horrid tale, and never dreamed of asking the other whether there was anything in it. Long time they were parted. At length they met again, and were very glad to find that it had been all a mistake; and the joy-bells—no, there the "Family Herald" collided with the German military code, and was smashed up: Edwin and Angelina—I mean Hans and Else—did not go to church, but to a joint suicide's grave. You see, now, that Mr. Alexander can neither have expected a great commercial success nor have been impelled to a forlorn hope by enthusiasm for the play as a work of art. Was there, you venture to suggest, an irresistible part for Mr. Alexander? No. Mr. Alexander could have easily resisted Hans. Hans was simply a dehumanised version of the part he had been playing for many months. He must have known that, as Hans, he would easily be resisted by the public. And as though to make assurance doubly sure, he even withheld from Hans the outward charm that Hans demanded. A tremor ran through the house, and afar one seemed

to hear a thousand and one picture post-cards rustling in vehement protest, when Mr. Alexander made his bow to the audience, wearing a wig that was evidently a mat of oakum woven by a convict. I protest, on grounds of political economy. What is to become of Mr. William Clarkson, and those other artists who have worked so long and honourably, if our actors are going to patronise prison-made goods? However, I don't want to be an alarmist. I recognise that this wig is not likely to create a wide precedent. It was an "ad hoc" wig; a wig to ensure the play's failure; a wrecker's wig. And Mr. Alexander will not wear it again, till, in the distant future, he decides that the popularity of his theatre is waning by reason of invariable success, and that the time is ripe for him to taste again those intoxicating sweets of failure which he procured for himself in the memorable month of March 1904.

SOME IRISH PLAYS AND PLAYERS

April 9, 1904.

The other day I came to one of the rare oases that are in the desert of our drama. For one whole afternoon my feet were on very verdure, and there was clear cold water for my parched throat. We plodders through this unending commercial desert could not plod so bravely if it were not for the oases, dear in proportion to their rarity, offered to us by uncommercial little societies. "The sands are running out" somewhere, perhaps; but here, in this desert, they run on for ever, from every point of the horizon, down our throats. For ever and for ever we plod through "Lady Thingummy's drawing-room overlooking the Green Park" (a mirage, that Green Park), and for ever and for ever Lady Thingummy (played by Miss So-and-So with her usual grace and sensibility) gives her husband (whose rôle is sustained by the manager with even more than his usual sincerity and conviction) reason to suppose that her flirtation with Sir Blank Dash (Mr. Dash Blank has never done anything better than his impersonation of Sir Blank Dash) is a really serious affair, whereas, of course, all the while . . . . Add a "decimal point recurring" over that last dot. Imagine those dots running on, like the desert's grains of sand, for ever and for ever, and then you will be able to enter into the feelings of a dramatic critic, and to realise with what joy he, condemned to an eternity and an infinity of barren drawing-room comedy or drawing-room comedy-drama, turns aside to such accidents as the Irish Theatre.

The afternoon's programme included three little plays: one by Mr. Yeats, "The King's Threshold"; and two by Mr. J. M. Synge,

"Riders to the Sea" and "In the Shadow of the Glen". Very widely though the three plays differed from one another, from all one derived the same quality of pleasure—the pleasure in something quite simple and quite strange. There was in none of the plays any structural complexity, and yet none of them was not truly dramatic. It is fashionably supposed that a playwright, in order to compass a truly dramatic effect, must steep himself in some kind of black art—must become a very wizard, master of all manner of mysterious processes whereat we outsiders dare scarcely guess. Well, of course, dramatic effect can be produced through many complex means. But it is a fallacy to suppose that only through such means can it be produced. Out of a dramatic idea you can produce a dramatic effect, even though you go about it quite simply and straightforwardly. You must, however, first catch your dramatic idea. That is where the amateur often fails, afterwards attributing his failure to his ignorance of technique. That parrot-cry "technique"! How many a good literary man has been scared off by it; and of how much, therefore, dramatic literature has been baulked by it! My advice to the terror-stricken is quite simple, and quite sound: first catch your dramatic idea, and then go artlessly ahead with your expression of it. When your play is acted, you will be delighted to find that the audience finds it quite dramatic: the idea will have carried it through for you. Belike, your very artlessness is an advantage. For though dramatic effect may be compassed through very complex and highly specialised means, the man who has mastered those means is often, in his turn, mastered by them, insomuch that one cannot see the wood for the trees. Mr. Pinero is an instance of a man who shows us only trees. Fine, upstanding, thriving trees they are, but—where is the wood? Mr. Yeats showed me a wood quite clearly, and Mr. Synge showed me two woods. And the sight was all the more welcome because there was no fuss about it. Simplicity! That was, also, the

keynote of the stage-setting. I have no objection to rich scenery and dresses—so long as the richness be not inappropriate or excessive. But, just for a change, how delightful to have a management which, so far from trying to dazzle us into awed calculations of its outlay, rather prides itself on its poverty. There is a prologue to "The King's Threshold", and in the printed copy of the play, Mr. Yeats notifies that this prologue was "not used in Dublin, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it." Of course, the pride of poverty is not in itself less ridiculous than the pride of wealth. But it has, for the London playgoer, at least, the charm of newness. Apart from that, it was fitting that a play about legendary Ireland, and two plays about peasants in modern Ireland, should be produced as simply as possible. As for the acting, I am not sure that so much simplicity as the players exemplified was quite artistically right. Mr. Yeats' poetry, doubtless—or any other man's poetry—gains by simple recitation. Dramatic inflections of the voice, dramatic gestures and so forth, do, of course, detract from sheer melody; but, equally, their absence detracts from drama. For dramatic poetry, therefore, the right treatment is a compromise. And when these players, trained to heed Mr. Yeats' poetry, and untrained to express anything dramatically, came to interpret Mr. Synge's prose, they did seem decidedly amiss. They, with their blank faces and their stiff movements, taking up their cues so abruptly, and seeming not to hear anything said by their interlocutors, certainly did impede the right effect of the play. For all that, I would not they had been otherwise. One could not object to them as to the ordinary amateur. They were not floundering in the effort to do something beyond their powers. With perfect simplicity, perfect dignity and composure, they were just themselves, speaking a task that they had well by heart. Just themselves; and how could such Irish selves not be irresistible? Several of our metropolitan players are Irish, and even they, how-

ever thickly coated with Saxonism, have a charm for us beyond their Saxon-blooded fellows. The Irish people, unspoiled, in their own island—who can resist them? But footlights heighten every effect; and behind them unspoiled Irish people win us quicklier and more absolutely than ever. And behind London footlights! There they have not merely their own charm, but that charm also which belongs to all exotics. Many people went many times, lately, to "In Dahomey", fascinated by the sight of a strange and remote race expressing through our own language things most strange to us and remote from us. Well, we are as far removed from the Irish people as from the negroes, and our spiritual distance seems all the greater by reason of our nearness in actual mileage. I admit that it was, in a way, more pleasant to see those negroes than to see these Irish folk. When we contemplate negroes, one clear impression comes through our dim bewilderment: we are assuredly in the presence of an inferior race. Whereas he must be a particularly dull Saxon who does not discern, and confess (at any rate to himself), that the Keltic race is, spiritually and intellectually, a race much finer and also much more attractive, than that to which he has the honour to belong.

I spoke of the Irish Theatre as "an accident" only in reference to myself. I did not mean to imply there was not a good reason for the Irish Theatre, or that there was not an expansive future for it. For a national drama, you require dramatists and players. Acting is not a natural art to the inexpressive Saxon; but the inexpressiveness of Mr. Yeats' own particular players does not shake my conviction that to the Kelt the art of acting will come almost as naturally as to the Latin. Likewise, true dramatists are much likelier to crop up in Ireland than in England. When an idea occurs to an Englishman, his first impulse is to get it put into practice. An Irishman broods over an idea, and translates it into some symbolic form. For instance, it has occurred to Mr. Yeats that he is not taken seriously enough. People buy his books

and compliment him very highly; but the State does not recognise him as a factor in public life. No title is bestowed on him. The Royal family does not make him its pet. He sees eminent statesmen, soldiers, lawyers, and other men of action, being petted and decorated all the time; but he, the man of Thought, is not invited to step out of his niche and join that giddy throng. Were Mr. Yeats an English poet, he would forthwith have written an article for one of the monthly reviews, forcibly demonstrating how necessary a part of the national life is Thought, and how extremely impolitic it is, therefore, for the State to encourage and honour only men of action. In fact, he would have done exactly what was done, a month or two ago, by Mr. William Watson. Were Mr. William Watson an Irishman, he would have written "The King's Threshold", telling us, with exquisite lyric fervour, the tale of the poet Seanchan, who, because King Guaire refused him his right to sit at meat among the great councillors and warriors, and thus dishonoured through him the majesty of all bards, lay down across the threshold of the palace, and there would have starved himself to death, had not King Edw—— I mean King Guaire, relenting at length, kneeled down to him and offered to him the very crown. As it is, I admired Mr. Watson's article very much, and I readily admit that King Edward, a practical man, would be less quickly perturbed by the dream-laden beauty of "The King's Threshold" than by the urgent and unanswerable arguments in that article. Only, one can't have it both ways; and Mr. Yeats' way naturally seems to me, as dramatic critic, the better way; and, as it is also the typical Irish way, I have high hopes of poetic drama in Ireland.

There is plenty of poetry in "Riders to the Sea", modern peasants though the characters are. The theme is much the same as in Heijermans' play "The Good Hope"—a mother whose youngest son is drowned, as all her other sons have been drowned, at sea. Mr. Synge, being an Irishman, is content to show us the pathos

of his theme: he does not, as did Heijermans, try to arouse any indignation. "So it is, and so it must be" is his tone. It is the tone of the mother herself, whose acquiescence is deeper than the acquiescence of the mother in "The Good Hope". She submits not merely because it were vain to rebel. To rebel is not in her nature. She has the deep fatalism of her race; and for her, the things that actually happen, for evil as for good, are blurred through the dreams that are within her. "In the Shadow of the Glen", as a farce, is not less typically Irish than the tragedy. In particular, it illustrates a very odd thing about the Irish people: their utter incapacity to be vulgar. What this farce would be like if it were translated by an Englishman, into English life, and were enacted by English players, I shudder to conceive. But I delight in the recollection of it as it was. And still cherished in my ears are the soft echoes of the brogues . . . Certainly, the Irish Theatre was an oasis. I will not trouble you, this week, with any samples of the sand I have since collected.

HYMENEAL DRAMATURGY

April 30, 1904.

In the beginning, Mr. Carton fingered many modes of playwriting. We never knew what he was going to do next. We sometimes chid him for not knowing his own mind. Such an objection to him could not possibly be raised now. He, of all our playwrights, is now the most self-possessed. More precisely than any of them he knows what he wants to do, and how to do it, and has mastered the secret of doing it always. He stands alone, an intense specialist in a form of his art unessayed by any other man. He is the one and never wavering exponent of what may be called Hymeneal Dramaturgy.

Every choice has its advantage, and there is a very sound commercial advantage in Mr. Carton's choice. The public has a kindness for domesticity in theatrical art, or, indeed, in any kind of public work. Political economy is not a showily engaging science, and the books written about it do not fatten their publishers. But there is, I am told, an exception. The books written by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb sell really well. For them there is a steady demand in the booksellers' shops, and in the public libraries they are well thumbed. The "and Mrs." opens all hearts, and through that breach dash the battalions of dry facts and deductions to the storming of all brains. Even more potent is domesticity in the theatre than in the study. Husband and wife working together behind the footlights, shoulder to shoulder, as leading man and leading lady, husband leading wife, or wife leading husband—there's a sight to gladden and moisten all eyes that behold it. Mr. Carton, it is true, does not himself appear behind the foot-

lights. But sufficient that he has conceived the part which his wife enacts, and has written every word that falls from her lips. All hearts are opened. Yet, though such conjunctions appeal very surely to the better side of our nature, some base æsthetic instinct in us warns us of a possible danger in them. When leading man and leading lady are persons united in wedlock, there is always, as I have suggested, the danger that one will be leading the other. There is always the danger that whichever has the lesser talent, however considerable that talent may be, will be wasting himself or herself in an inappropriate part in a play chosen for the sake of a part signally appropriate to his or her mate. Similarly, there is the danger that a playwright whose leading lady is always his wife will cripple either his own talent or hers. I do not profess to say whether Miss Compton in acting or Mr. Carton in playwriting has the more considerable talent. Each of them is delightful. But I can so far distinguish between them as to say that Miss Compton's talent is not versatile, whereas Mr. Carton, in the beginning, proved that he could be versatile to a fault. Lately doing the same thing over and over again, he has acquired in the doing of it an extreme virtuosity, nor does he ever lose his freshness of touch. Nevertheless, it seems rather a pity that he doesn't, now and again, try something else. Suppose, for example, that Shakespeare's wife had not stayed by the Avon, but had come to London and gone on the stage. And suppose that Shakespeare had been a more uxorious man than he was, and had written all his plays around Mistress Shakespeare. What the result? Let us assume that tradition is right, and that Mistress Shakespeare was a shrew. We should thus have had the early scenes of Katherine and Petruchio just as they stand; but the whole charm of the play is in Katherine's conversion; and this would have been sacrificed, as lying outside Mistress Shakespeare's range. And consider how different a play "Hamlet" would have been, and how far inferior to the play that Shakespeare actually wrote, if it had

been conditioned by the need for making Ophelia not only a shrew, but also the central figure of the scheme. Imagine the world well lost by Antony for the naggings of Cleopatra; and the forest of Arden re-echoing to the shrill tantrums of Rosalind; and even Cordelia merciless to the stricken King, her father; and Juliet fuming on the balcony. Imagine all Shakespeare's women as vixens, and all Shakespeare's plays as hinging on vixenishness. Then you will be able to imagine, also, how much we lose through the iron law made by Mr. Carton that his every play shall centre round a genial, good-natured, very modern-mannered woman of the world, with all her wits about her. I do not pretend that this actual loss is so great as that hypothetic one. Nevertheless, it is no small loss. I feel it and regret it.

"The Rich Mrs. Repton", at the Duke of York's—what new thing can I say about a play which is, albeit delightful, so little new? Enter Mrs. Jack Repton, after long spin on motor with Lord Charles Dorchester; and we know that Lord Charles will suggest a whisky-and-soda, and that Mrs. Jack will say, with a slow beatific smile, "Well, what do *you* think?" We know that she will ask for a very little whisky and a great deal of soda, and that she will say, when the tumbler is brought to her, "Now, don't speak to me for a moment," and, setting the empty tumbler down, "That was a great moment." We know her, and her slangy good-breeding, and her lazy good-humour, and her sharp capacity for getting people out of scrapes. We know all the hoops she will go through. Miss Compton impersonates her as deliciously as ever. Yet I have an unholy craving to see Miss Compton, just once and away, in some other part—to see her not quite so perfectly at ease, with a not quite so perfect grasp of the whole thing. I have said that hers is not a versatile talent; but even to see her floundering hopelessly would not displease me. And who am I, anyway, to declare that she is not versatile—I who do not

remember seeing her in any but this one part? No doubt, her personality is better suited to this one part than to any other. But personality can shine more or less brightly through various manifestations. At any rate, it should be given the chance of shining through various manifestations. I do not urge Miss Compton to try her luck as (say) Lady Macbeth, or even in any modern version of that part. But there are many different kinds and degrees of geniality. And why should Miss Compton confine herself to just this one degree and this one kind among so many? Nor is Miss Compton, as the only actress whose husband writes plays, the only actress who is forced permanently along the line of least resistance. It is one of the pities of the modern stage that nearly all actresses and nearly all actors are thus restricted. So soon as one of them makes a hit, she or he is engaged again and again to make just that same hit elsewhere. And when the time comes, at length, he or she dies or retires in the act of making still that same dear little old hit. For players and managers alike, this is a safe policy; but it is not a glorious policy; and for the honour of the art of acting, and for the confounding of fools emboldened to deny that acting is a fine art, I should like to see it abandoned. The Duke of York's Theatre is controlled by a syndicate; and syndicates, especially, play for safety. There, accordingly, in "The Rich Mrs. Repton", one finds the safe policy in its fullest swing. All the principal parts are played by players who have made repeated hits in precisely similar parts elsewhere. It is a melancholy spectacle—all this high accomplishment in the doing of one thing, with all this inevitable loss of power for doing anything else; all these artists marking time so exquisitely, every one of them at his or her appointed post, never outstepping by half an inch the little square that has been chalked for her or his footfalls; and all the younger ones losing, as all the elder ones have lost long ago, the power to move in any direction whatsoever. Better than such

stagnancy the blind-man's-buff of the old stock companies. One sighs for a mean.

Thus for Miss Compton's sake, not less than for his own, Mr. Carton really ought to write some other sort of play. Heaven forbid that I should try to deflect him from Hymeneal Dramaturgy. I do but ask him to put a wider interpretation on the thing.

MR. GILBERT'S RENTRÉE (AND MINE)

May 14, 1904.

A YEAR or so ago a fearful thing befell me. Mr. Arthur Bourchier ceased to send me seats for the first nights at his theatre. Yet, cast thus into outer darkness, I uttered no cry of anguish. In the language of our police force, I "went quiet". The presumptive reason for Mr. Bourchier's sternness was that I had rather regularly chidden him for playing comedic parts in a farcical manner, and had rather regularly hinted that Miss Violet Vanbrugh's true vocation was not for comedy, but for tragedy, melodrama, romance. Now, these may have been horrid truths; but, at least, they were—or seemed to me—truths; and I had had no malicious intent in speaking them. Therefore, I suppose I ought to have been very angry at being cast out. I suppose I ought to have rushed through that outer darkness into print . . . a free country, vanity of actor-managers, intolerable attempts to stifle honest criticism, shall such things be? et patati, et patata. But questions of principle, except when there is menace to my own personal convenience, do not (I am ashamed to say) stir my blood like a bugle-note. And it has been for me no personal inconvenience not to go to the Garrick Theatre. Were this a daily paper, and I therefore a purveyor of news besides criticism, then I should have come out strong on the question of principle. As things are, I am free to pick and choose among theatres and plays. So long as I have enough material for a weekly essay, all is well. And it has so happened that when ever Mr. Bourchier has produced a play, some other subject was at my service; and it has not so happened that any of Mr.

Bourchier's productions (very admirable though they all were, doubtless) was one which I felt I *must* see for my own delectation. Besides, I am a philosophic, sympathetic person. I never can be angry with any one, never having been able to cure myself of the power to see other people's points of view. It is, as I have more than once demonstrated, very natural that mimes should be sensitive—more sensitive than any other artists, except singers—for that themselves are the medium of their art. How, then, could I have grown angry with Mr. Bourchier? The histrionic temperament is a thing apart. I was sure Mr. Bourchier was sure I had been malignantly persecuting his wife and himself. It seemed so natural that he should wish me, scoundrel of the deepest dye, never to darken his doors again. So, delicate-minded, I was glad not to be darkening them. An excess of delicacy? A cat may look at a king! But suppose the king to be one who can't bear to be looked at except with blinking admiration. Then, surely, any right-feeling cat would direct elsewhere its steadfast yellow gaze. On the whole, I think it was too bad of me that I did, at length, last Wednesday, insinuate myself into the Garrick Theatre. But the temptation to see a new play by Mr. Gilbert was too strong for my better nature. I plead also, in extenuation, that I chose a place very remote from the stage. Mr. Bourchier did not see me. He did not blench behind his make-up. The words did not die on his lips. The curtain was not rung down.

Anyhow, I could not have left unsampled anything done by Mr. Gilbert. He has given me so many hours of pleasure, and is so illustriously enshrined among my minor gods. I think the lilt of his lyrics is always running somewhere in my subconscious mind. And the "Bab Ballads"—how shall I ever express my love of them? A decade ago Clement's Inn was not the huddle of gaudy skyscrapers that it is now; and in the centre of it was a sombre little quadrangle, one of whose windows

was pointed out to me as the window of the room in which Gilbert had written those poems, and had cut the wood-blocks that immortally illustrate them. And thereafter I never passed that window without the desire to make some sort of obeisance, or to erect some sort of tablet. Surely the Muse still hovers sometimes, affectionately, there where "Bab's" room once was. Literature has many a solemn masterpiece that one would without a qualm barter for that absurd and riotous one. Nor is the polished absurdity of the Savoy lyrics so dear as the riotous absurdity of those earlier ballads, wherein you may find all the notions that informed the plots of the operas, together with a thousand and one other notions, and with a certain wild magic never quite recaptured. I know nothing comparable, for extravagance, with the "Bab Ballads". None but Mr. Gilbert could have written them. And only in his hot youth could Mr. Gilbert have written them. "The Fairy's Dilemma", his new play, is, in scheme, a very good specimen of what is commonly called Gilbertian humour—that later humour of carefully calculated extravagance, such as we find in the Savoy pieces. But, good specimen though it is, I must confess that I don't rejoice in it. Why, indeed, should I hesitate to make the confession? One is naturally tender to the autumnal work of a writer in whose genius one believes, but who has never, even in his prime, triumphantly expressed his genius, and has never made it clear to the multitude. But Mr. Gilbert is a popular classic; and I may be frank without compunction. The only compunction were in pretending to confuse what bores me with that in which my soul revels. Frankly "The Fairy's Dilemma" bored me. Had it happened to be an opera, with music by Sullivan, I daresay I should not have been bored at all. But without the music, the machinery of the humour creaked for me, audibly. Perhaps, even without the music, I should have heard no creaking if Mr. Gilbert had written the play in verse. His humour and his versification are

inextricably connected; for his sense of rhyme and rhythm are as humorous as his ideas. Take any favourite stanza from the "Bab Ballads", and translate it into prose, and see how poor a thing it will seem in comparison. It will still, indeed, be funny. Many writers of humorous verse are men whose humour lies wholly in their technique; and they, when they write in prose, surprise one by their deadly dulness. "Bab", on the other hand, is full of intrinsically humorous ideas. It is (for random example) an intrinsically humorous idea that the sexton and the beadle of the Rev. Hopley Porter were of exemplary character on Sundays, but were ready for any infamous deed during the week. One smiles at that. But one laughs aloud at

> "These men were men who could
> Hold liberal opinions:
> On Sundays they were good—
> On week-days they were minions."

It is needless to insist further on the difference between the effect of the original version and the effect of my own prose translation. And there is just that difference between the effect of "The Fairy's Dilemma" and the effect of (say) "Iolanthe". Nay, there is a greater difference. Mr. Gilbert's prose is, and has always been, peculiarly dull and heavy. It is possible to use the medium of prose wittily; though few people are aware of the possibility, and fewer still have the gift. Stevenson had the gift; and Whistler had it, too. They could play pranks with words—could set words playing pranks with one another. Mr. Gilbert's one notion of humorous prose is to use as many long words and as many formal constructions as possible—a most tedious trick, much practised by other mid-Victorian writers. In prose Stevenson or Whistler could have made that analysis of the sexton and the cradle almost as funny as it was made in verse by Mr. Gilbert. But Mr. Gilbert's own prose version would be something to this effect: "These two

individuals were, I may be permitted parenthetically to inform you, of a somewhat abnormal character, inasmuch as, whereas on the Sabbath their general behaviour was such that not even the most censorious could discover in it any reasonable grounds for disapprobation, they were, throughout the remainder of the week, notoriously predisposed to the commission of the most nefarious actions imaginable." Dickens often wrote rather like that. Mr. Pinero always writes exactly like that. Mr. Gilbert handed on the torch. I hope it will soon have burned itself out. In "The Fairy's Dilemma" all the characters talk rather like that, except the Demon Alcohol and the Fairy Rosebud, who talk mostly in verse. What a relief those two are! When the Fairy Rosebud says to her attendants:

> "Dance on the sward before these stucco portals,
> Which, I may state, are Mr. Justice Whortle's",

then, indeed, we get the true Gilbertian thrill. Yes, assuredly the whole play should have been in verse.

Even so, however, it would not have quite "come off". Verse is not the only thing that it ought to have been written in; it ought also to have been written in the 'seventies. For in the 'seventies pantomime was flourishing still. Demon King and Fairy Queen, transformation scene and harlequinade, were familiar and popular things. But to satirise them now, in the 'noughts, as Mr. Gilbert does, is to shoot at a target long since removed from the range of vision. Mr. Gilbert once wrote a delightful parody of Martin Tupper. Surely he would not now sit down and write another parody of Martin Tupper. Indeed, he evidently does not recognise, to some extent, the need to be contemporaneous in parody; for he has a shot at the criticisms in the "Times". But this skit, like the reference of motor-cars and other recent things, seems queerly out of key with the play as

a whole. For the mortal characters "date" not less obviously than the fairies. There *are* no mild young curates, with side-whiskers, and with a horror of the stage, nowadays. There *are* no young military baronets who compose love-verses and sing them with piano-accompaniment, nowadays. There *are* no ladies who sit at their toilet-tables combing tresses of false hair, nowadays. Such ladies ceased to exist when chignons ceased to exist. And the Rev. Aloysius Parfitt, M.A., and Col. Sir Trevor Mauleverer, Bart.—they too are as extinct as chignons. They are but the ghosts of the Rev. Hopley Porter and of Lorenzo de Lardy, arisen from between the pages of the "Bab Ballads". They are interesting enough to the connoisseur of changes in fashion. But there is little fun to be got out of them. Had "The Fairy's Dilemma" been written and produced in the 'seventies, and were this production of it a revival, then the satire in it would seem to us all (as the satire in 1880's "Patience" lately seemed) quite fresh and vital. But the novelty of the thing is fatal.

I hardly dare to say that Mr. Bourchier was very good as the clown in the harlequinade. He will think I am persecuting him. On the other hand, I hardly dare to say that as the Baronet he played with unusual naturalness and restraint. He will think I am cadging for invitations to first nights. What dare I say of Miss Vanbrugh? In a simple and glowing gown of dark blue, she looked marvellously like a Rossetti; and she gave to her part all the charm of her vivid intensity. Had Mr. Gilbert's genius been moulded by the P. R. B. . . . but enough! I will *not* say the wrong thing.

PATRIOTIC DRAMA AT THE HAYMARKET

May 28, 1904.

England is, I think, the one country in which a play with an anti-national bias may have a popular success. I cannot imagine a Parisian manager daring to produce a comedy in which the hero, an Englishman, would score off the Frenchmen at every point. Yet "Monsieur Beaucaire", over here, was promptly folded to the public bosom. I can imagine New York's fury over a play in which not all the soldiers of King George would be scoundrels and poltroons, nor all the rebels heroes and saints. Yet our own melodramatists have, again and again, made up the converse prescription, very lucratively. There is no nation that we would not gladly see glorified in drama; and there is no nation that could tolerate any but a ridiculous presentment of us. How is it that we alone are graced with this sense of international chivalry? To answer this question, we must ask another. What is chivalry? It is the instinct of condescension felt by the stronger person towards the weaker, or, at least, by one person for another whom he imagines to be the weaker. If a lady steps into a full tramcar, the nearest man rises and proffers her his seat, on the principle that a man's power of endurance is greater than a woman's. He performs, with a pitying flourish, an act of condescension. International chivalry has exactly the same motive as personal chivalry. England, a nation in its prime, feels a contemptuous pity for France, a nation past its prime, and for America, a nation racked by growing pains. I give these three descriptions not as surely true, but as representing what seems surely true to the average Englishman. It may be that England

is actually inferior both to America and to France. But in the average Englishman is ingrained the conviction of England's supremacy. If an Amazon, in complete steel, lightly bounded into a full tramcar, the nearest man, even if he happened to be partially paralysed, would rise and proffer her his seat. And she, doubtless, would take it. For in woman, as in man, is ingrained the principle of woman's physical inferiority. Even so, in France and in America and other nations, as in England, the average man believes in England's almightiness. Therefore, when we would blame them for their intolerance, let us remember that it is but the defect of a good quality—modesty. And when next we preen ourselves on our chivalry, let us spare a passing blush for the defect that causes it.

Though we are conceited enough not to mind being belittled, and seeing our rivals magnified, we are also vain enough to enjoy being flattered, and seeing our rivals made game of, now and again. "Lady Flirt", the play produced last Wednesday at the Haymarket, has evidently been fashioned to catch this mood in us. It is a play *ad majorem gloriam Britanniæ;* and I doubt not that Britannia will bridle voluptuously at its pæans, with many a titter at its disparagements of Gaul. Ironically enough, the play is not a home product, but an importation from the very land which it, as doctored for the British market, compares so unfavourably with our own. I did not see "Mademoiselle Flirt" in Paris. But I assume that in that original version all the persons of the play were French. In France, as in England, there are some serious, solid, sterling folk, and some frivolous, light, worthless folk: "Les Deux Écoles" in fact. And I assume that, as in M. Capus' play, the contrast between them was a contrast between compatriots. But the sly British adapter knew a trick worth two of that. And his trick, though brilliant, is very simple. The good persons of the play become English; the bad ones remain French. No mere moral gulf yawns, the Channel

itself heaves, between those opposite groups. On the one hand are two brothers; good men, and serious, solid, sterling; fine, square, upstanding; endowed with rough humour; loveable, admirable, in every relation of life. The younger of them is what the newspapers call "a mighty hunter before the Lord", and has just returned to Europe from shooting big game. The elder is a diplomat, working so strenuously for his country that his wife strays into a perilous flirtation with another man. That other man—what shall we say of him? What *need* we say of him except that he is a Frenchman? What *need* we have said of the two brothers except that they are Englishmen—Lord Melborough (*of the British Embassy*) and the Hon. Paul Harding? But though the national labels be in themselves sufficient, it is very pleasant, and does our hearts good, to see the national differences minutely worked out and illustrated on the stage. What a poor, poor figure is cut, between Lord Melborough and Mr. Harding, by M. le Comte de la Roche! Granted that the fellow has a sort of sparkle, such as might for a little while please some foolish woman. Granted that he has a sort of tact and insight, whereby he pleases that foolish woman, Lady Melborough. But very soon the most foolish woman in the world must see through him. We ourselves see through him from the moment we set eyes on him; and what we see through him is the whole French nation—frivolous, light, worthless. We see through him a falling birth-rate. We see Sedan and Panama. We see Fashoda and Dreyfus and countless other sights not less gratifying. How lamentably he bows and scrapes, shrugs and chants, in the presence of that grunting, commanding Briton! He knows he has done wrong. He shrinks from the explanation which is demanded of him in the billiard-room. He will have a drink first. He pours some whisky into a tumbler. It seems almost sacrilege that Britain's beverage should be savoured by such lips as his. For once, our adapter has erred in taste,

erred in knowledge. Absinthe is the stuff which this Frenchman should, and would, have taken with a trembling hand. And the Englishman should, and would, have snatched it from his hand and poured it upon the carpet, sternly eyeing him the while. The Frenchman wants to fight a duel, does he? Why don't he use fists, as Mr. Harding very properly suggests? He won't, won't he? Ugh! Coward! He had thought, at one time, of going to fight on the side of the Boers, had he? Yah! He says something to imply that he does not take a cold tub every morning. Boo-o-ooh! Mr. Harding compares him and his kind—chatterers and grimacers—with the monkeys whom he has seen in the forests of Africa. Hear, hear, hear! A hit, a very palpable hit, rightly repeated at the fall of the curtain, when we see the Frenchman obediently answering to the call of "Monkey!" and skulking away to avoid the righteous wrath of a British husband.

On the French stage this British husband would be represented as a man with very long whiskers and very prominent teeth, dressed in a knickerbocker suit of enormous checks. Since the Frenchman in "Lady Flirt" accords altogether so exactly to the general notion we formed of Frenchmen in the days of John Leech, and as that notion is now but an empty and insincere survival, I should prefer that Mr. Cyril Maude, interpreting that Frenchman, should wear closely-cropped hair, waxed moustaches, a "Napoleon", a flat-brimmed hat, and peg-top trousers. But, superficially, the Haymarket is nothing if not modern; and Mr. Maude, with a small moustache curled upwards, and with his clothes made by an English tailor, is very like dozens of men whom you may actually see to-day in Paris, and not at all unlike dozens of men whom you may actually see to-day in London. Surely that is an error in judgment. It suggests the brotherhood of man—that queer and unpleasant fact from which the adapter had so tenderly shielded us. It hurts

our pride. Away with it! and then will "Lady Flirt" achieve perfectly the purpose for which it was designed. For my own part, I confess, I wish the adapter had not so designed it. His dialogue is so unusually graceful and witty, without being in the least formal, and he has evidently so nice an appreciation of little points in character, and of little facts in life, that the play (artificial though it is in scheme) would have altogether charmed me, but for that grim determination to set Britannia voluptuously bridling.

SARAH

July 9, 1904.

It is our instinct to revere old age. In this reverence, if we analyse it, we find two constituent emotions—the emotion of pity, and the emotion of envy. Opposite though they are, both are caused by one thing. It is sad that so brief a span remains, but it must be delightful to have accomplished so long a span. Any moment may be our last. A flash of lightning, a side-slip, a falling brick—always some improvisible chance that may precipitate us into the unknown. And how foolish we should look then—we with so little to our account! Certainly, it is enviable to have accumulated so much as have those elders, and to know, as they know, that no power can steal it away. Romantic awe is stirred in us by the contemplation of anything that has been going on for a long time. Ruins are apt to leave us cold; but any upstanding and habitable old building must touch and warm our imagination. Undefeated by time, any old building, however humble and obscure, becomes for us majestic. But greater, of course, and more haunting, the majesty of an old castle or cathedral. To have towered illustriously through the ages, a centre of significance and pomp, and to be towering thus even now! As with buildings, so with human beings. The romantic quality of an old person is intensified in ratio to the prominence of his or her past and present. There has been in our own time one figure that incomparably illustrated this rule. I am glad to have lived in a time when it was possible to set eyes on the aged Queen Victoria. I can conceive no more romantic thrill than I had whenever, in the last years of her reign, I saw her drive

past in that old-fashioned barouche, attended not only by the clattering cavalcade of material guardsmen, but also by the phantoms—not less clearly there—of Melbourne and the Duke, Louis Philippe, Palmerston, Peel, Disraeli the younger—of all those many successive sovereigns, statesmen, soldiers, who were but great misty names to us, yet had been sharp little realities to her, in the interminable pageant of her existence. Strange, to see her with my own eyes—that little old lady, in the queer barouche, on her way to Paddington Station. In Queen Victoria I saw always something of that uncanny symbolism which Mr. Pater say in the portrait of Mona Lisa. Hers, too, surely, was the head upon which all the ends of the world were come, and the eyelids were a little weary. . . . There is no one now to give me that kind of emotion in like degree; but, certainly, the person most nearly filling the void is Madame Sarah Bernhardt, who has played during the past fortnight at His Majesty's Theatre. Year by year, when she comes among us, my wonder and awe are intensified. Seeing her, a few nights ago, in "La Sorcière", I was more than ever moved by the apparition. The great Sarah—pre-eminently great throughout the past four decades! My imagination roved back to lose itself in the golden haze of the Second Empire. My imagination roved back to reel at the number of plays that had been written, the number of players whose stars had risen and set, the number of theatres that had been built and theatres that had been demolished, since Sarah's début. The theatrical history of more than forty years lay strewn in the train of that bowing and bright-eyed lady. The applause of innumerable thousands of men and women, now laid in their graves, was still echoing around her. And still she was bowing, bright-eyed, to fresh applause. The time would come when our noisy hands would be folded and immobile for ever. But, though we should be beneath the grass, Sarah would still be behind the footlights—be bowing, as graciously as ever,

to audiences recruited from the ranks of those who are now babes unborn. A marvellous woman! For all the gamut of her experience, she is still lightly triumphant over time. All this has been to her, as to Mona Lisa, but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the hair. Hers is the head upon which all the ends of the world are come, and the eyelids are not at all weary. . . .

Such was my first impression, when Sarah reappeared to me in "La Sorcière". But presently I had to qualify it. Superficially, it is quite true that Sarah triumphs over time. Her appearance, her voice, her movements are all as ever. But her spirit shows the inevitable signs of wear and tear. Time has succeeded in damping the sacred fire that burnt within her. Gone from her are the passion and sincerity that once held us in thrall. As Phèdre, as Fédora, as any of the characters created by her in her prime, she is as enthralling, doubtless, as in the past, forasmuch as her unimpaired energy and memory enable her to reproduce exactly the effects that she produced then. But when she plays a new part, as in "La Sorcière", you are definitely aware that she is not feeling anything—that she is merely urging herself to the performance of certain tricks. Very perfectly she performs these time-honoured tricks. The lovely voice is always in tune and time, whether it coo or hiss, and the lovely gestures are all in their proper places, and the lovely face is as expressive as ever. But the whole performance is hollow—art without life—a dead thing galvanised. Of course, the play—a play written by the venerable M. Sardou for no purpose but to show Sarah off in the ways in which she likes to be shown off—is itself an utterly dead thing. But there was a time when Sarah could have put life into it. And for her failure to put life into it now we may console ourselves with the implicit revelation that she, too, after all, is mortal, like the rest of us.

Though her genius has been touched thus by Time, all untouched is her love of adventure; and she has given a performance of "Pelléas et Mélisande", with herself as Pelléas, and Mrs. Campbell as Mélisande. I did not see this performance. I love the play too well, and am loth that my memory of it as performed by Mrs. Campbell in her own language, with Mr. Martin Harvey as Pelléas, should be complicated with any memory less pleasing. I am quite willing to assume that Mrs. Campbell speaks French as exquisitely as she speaks English, and that Sarah's Pelléas is not, like her Hamlet and her Duc de Reichstadt, merely ladylike. But the two facts remain that Sarah is a woman and that Mrs. Campbell is an Englishwoman. And by these two facts such a performance is ruled out of the sphere of art into the sphere of sensationalism. If Maeterlinck were a sensationalist, that would not matter.

A PANACEA

July 23, 1904.

Spare me the task of reviewing the past season. I hate, especially in the dawn of a vacation, to be pessimistic; and what else could I be if I recalled the immediate past? So let me imagine some other kind of immediate past—a kind that would justify me in optimism. Let me compile for you the pleasant history of what might, and ought to, have happened, as though it really and truly had been happening. . . .

Extract from "The Court Circular" for 1 *April,* 1904.

"This morning His Majesty received in audience the Earl of Clarendon (Lord Chamberlain), Mr. George Alexander Redford (Examiner of Plays), and the members of the London County Council committee for the licensing of theatres.

"In the evening His Majesty presided over the thirty-seventh annual dinner of the Actors' Benevolent Fund."

Extract from report in "Daily Telegraph" of Actors' Benevolent Fund Dinner.

. . . "His Majesty, who was looking (if we may say so without disrespect) the picture of health, had, with that unerring tact and kind-heartedness which have so endeared him to his subjects, elected to aptly signify his interest in things appertaining to the theatre by appearing simply attired in the costume affected by the wealthier section of playgoers. On rising to graciously propose the toast of the evening, the King was received with a ringing volley of loyal applause. His Majesty said 'My

lords and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I am here to-night. I am myself a playgoer of many years' standing. I regard the theatre as a great possible factor in the intellectual life of my subjects. But I regret to say that the theatre does not fulfil its function in this respect. We have no serious drama, and there seems to be no prospect of our getting a serious drama. The few playhouses not yet given over to a certain vile and degrading form of entertainment—I refer, my lords and gentlemen, to musical comedy—offer us plays which have little or no perceptible relation to the realities of life. How different it is in a neighbouring country with which I may boast a close connexion—I refer, my lords and gentlemen, to Germany. There we find Sudermann, Hauptmann, and many other scarcely less serious playwrights; and we find that they (whom I am proud to claim as, in a sense, my compatriots) are intensely popular, and are rivalled in popularity only by Ibsen, Björnson, and other alien masters. Why this distressing difference between Germans and Englishmen? Why should they, in relation to the theatre, be joyfully serious, whilst we are dully frivolous? These are not new questions. For years past, there has been a great deal of talk on this subject. But none of the talkers has done anything. I, my lords and gentlemen, propose to do something. Since my accession, I have footed it, to the national good, in statecraft and in diplomacy. I am now going to exercise a not, I hope, less beneficent influence on art. I have decided that all the theatres in my kingdom shall be closed forthwith, for a period of ten years. In that drastic interval the public will, I earnestly hope, lose its taste for musical comedy, and be, when once more the doors of the theatres are thrown open to it, patient of what we call the legitimate drama. Hitherto that term "legitimate" has hardly been deserved. But I think that ten years hence there may be a crop of plays to deserve it. Our dramatists will have had plenty of time in which to live—to observe life.

They will have returned to their work like giants refreshed. They will have returned joyously realising that there is an outer world to be mirrored by their art. Some of them, of course, will never return. No matter. We can well spare those who have not the true vocation. It may be objected that, in the drastic interval, the mimes will forget their technique. Let them. It is much more important that they should have time to observe their fellow-creatures than that they should continue to be elaborately unlike their fellow-creatures. Better a knowing amateur than an ignorant professional. Nor will there be anything to prevent our mimes, ten years hence, from acquiring gradually a new technique, founded on actuality. My lords and gentlemen, I have done. It only remains for me to say that the new regulations will be enforced with all possible despatch. I give the managers three days' grace. On the fourth day the official seals will be affixed to the various portals. I raise my glass and drink continued prosperity to the Actors' Benevolent Fund, on whose resources may my decision bring no undue strain.'"

Extract from leading article in same issue.

"His Majesty the King, with his unfailing grip of all that is essential to the welfare of his lieges, foreshadowed last night a scheme which must meet with the hearty approval of all thinking men and women. It is a policy grounded on principles which we ourselves have implicitly advocated for many years. Now that his Majesty the King, with that peculiar courage and sagacity which" . . .

Extract from resolution passed unanimously by meeting of theatrical managers, Sir Henry Irving in the chair, 3 April.

. . . "and that we humbly beg to assure His Majesty of our loyal appreciation of this the latest and not least of the many

evidences of His Majesty's gracious interest in our calling" . . .

Extract from "World", 4 April.

"Our readers will regret to learn that Mr. William Archer, so long endeared to them by his whole-hearted faith in the steady progress of modern dramatic art, is seriously indisposed."

Extract from "Daily Telegraph", 5 April.

"The unfailing kindliness and thoughtfulness of His Majesty the King were never more felicitously manifested than when he consented, despite the pressure of those numerous other duties which he indefatigably fulfils, to close some of the principal theatres in person. Yesterday forenoon His Majesty, in the presence of a large and brilliant assembly, performed this picturesque old ceremony successively at Wyndham's Theatre and the New Theatre, affixing the seals with his own hand. Afterwards, he honoured Sir Charles Wyndham with his presence at luncheon, which was served in a marquee erected in the Charing Cross Road."

Paragraph in "Daily Telegraph", 15 April.

"Some affecting scenes were witnessed yesterday at Liverpool Docks, where many actors, actresses, playwrights, costumiers, wigmakers, dramatic critics and refreshment contractors were waiting to embark on the emigrant ship. It was noticeable that, though there were many tear-stained faces in the crowd, and many 'longing lingering looks' were cast back at the old country, not a man or woman uttered a word of complaint. As the great ship sailed majestically out of port, the emigrants were heard to sing 'God Save the King'." . . .

Paragraph in "World", 18 April.

"At the moment of going to press we learn that Mr. William Archer had passed a fairly good night. The fever has somewhat abated, and there is a marked improvement in his general condition. The patient is said to be determined, in the event of his recovery, to remain on British territory."

Paragraph in "Daily Telegraph", 19 April.

"It is pleasant to find that among the dramatists who are remaining among us are Captains Robert Marshall and Basil Hood, both of whom have just been re-gazetted into their former regiments. Mr. Hubert Henry Davis has entered his name as a candidate for matriculation at one of the colleges of Cambridge. Mr. H. V. Esmond has been sent to an excellent preparatory school."

Paragraph in "The World", 25 April.

"Yesterday morning, Mr. William Archer, who is now happily convalescent, took up his position at the door of one of our leading theatres. He informs us from his camp-stool that since his recovery from his severe illness he is inclined to modify his previous convictions. 'It may be,' he says with characteristic honesty, 'that all was not so well with the British drama as I had surmised.' At the same time, he is confident of the future, and looks keenly forward, though without impatience, to the evening of 15 May, 1914, the date fixed for the next production."

A PLAY FOR THE POPULACE

September 24, 1904.

THERE can be no shadow of a doubt that Mr. Zangwill has, in the language of the vulgar, done it this time. The time of "Children of the Ghetto" was some years ago, and my memory of it is dimmed; but I remember enough to know that it was a time when Mr. Zangwill, emphatically, did *not* do it. The play was a failure, for Mr. Zangwill had not enough theatrical instinct—or perhaps it was only experience that was lacking—to vivify on the stage a large and serious conception, such as he had vivified in books. Even had he vivified this conception, for you and me, the play might have failed commercially; for the public, as you know, has an obstinate predilection for futile things. Mr. Zangwill, older and wiser now, has gone, in the writing of "Merely Mary Ann", nap on that predilection. Not that he is yet so old or so wise as to hush up the cynicism of his procedure. Two of the persons in his play, musicians, are discussing the public's taste in music. "You know," says one, "what the public wants?" "Yes," says the other, "it wants treacle." "Ah," says the one, "but it wants a special kind of treacle." "I know," says the other: "'Golden Syrup'." I was afraid that this sardonic touch was going to ruin the play. Audiences, dog-like, cannot bear to be laughed at; and a playwright who puts his tongue in his cheek may as well put his play in his waste-paper basket. Besides, usually a man who does work beneath his dignity cannot do it really well. His jokes may be bad, and his sentiment false; but somehow they lack just the particular requisite quality of badness and falseness. "Merely Mary Ann" is a blest exception.

The audience did not notice Mr. Zangwill's jibe at it and at himself, for, strange to relate, the play rang quite true—the hollowness seemed really hollow.

The theme of the play is rather a good one. The central figure is akin to the poet in "Candida"—a young man of good family, driven out of his home because he insists on following his natural bent and devoting himself to musical composition. He takes a room in a Bloomsbury lodging-house; and here he lives tormented, in the liberty he has gained for his genius, by the sordidness and solitude of his material existence. The servant who waits on him and the other lodgers is a pretty girl from Somersetshire; and for her, as supplying the one touch of poetry here, he conceives a romantic regard, which she more than reciprocates. An offer from a music-publisher enables him to pay the landlady her bill and to take a cottage somewhere in the country. The girl is heartbroken at his departure. Why, he reflects, should he not take her with him? Of course he has too much worldly wisdom to marry her; but, even on grounds of humanity, would it not be better for her to live with him than to be left in loneliness and drudgery here? A very good play of a serious kind might be based on the subsequent history of these two persons. Disparity of class, in its effect on genuine affection, is always an interesting subject. So, too, is the conflict between artistic genius and genuine affection. I can imagine that Mr. Zangwill would, in the epoch aforesaid, have treated his theme grimly. Of course, the musician would have belonged to that race to which musicians mostly do belong, and would have been an earnest believer in all the tenets of its faith. The barrier to matrimony would have been the barrier of faith, not of class. But, essentially, this would have made no difference; and the resultant play would have been, at least, an interesting failure. On his present tack, Mr. Zangwill knew full well that his musician must be an aristocratic gentile, and that his play must be a sort

of fairy-story. A really good fairy-story, on this as on any other theme, I should welcome. Mr. Barrie would have achieved it. He would have touched his theme with a whimsical magic, transporting it straight away from the plane of reality to the plane of fantasy. Mr. Zangwill has not this magic. He can only, as it were, doctor reality. His characters are everyday people behaving as no person would on any day behave—a compromise which is, I grant you, all that the public needs. They are not figments; they are merely askew. And the mischief is that they are not at all, for me, charmingly askew. Disparity of class between lovers is a very ticklish subject, especially in comedy. It requires the keenest tact and delicacy in handling. It is one of the subjects which can hardly be made to yield the same effect in art as in life. In life there is nothing repulsive in the fact of a gentleman falling in love with a servant-girl. But transfer this fact to the comic stage, and the effect of it on a sensitive person will (barring that almost superhuman tact and delicacy) be as unpleasant as were in real life the fact of a lady being in love with her footman. Mr. Zangwill has failed, from my standpoint, to do what almost everybody else would have failed to do. But he has, also from that standpoint, failed deeplier than a great many other people would have failed. His star rose in or about the year 1890. At that period every new star gravitated surely to one or other of two constellations. Every new writer became straightway either one of Mr. Henley's young men or one of Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's young men. Mr. Zangwill became one of Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's young men. Mercifully, the allegiance lasted not long, for Mr. Zangwill had in him fine stuff which could only be developed outside the Jeromian sphere of influence. But it seems that even in that short period was absorbed an ineradicable virus. Mr. Zangwill in his prime, deviating from serious literature to frivolous dramaturgy, recalls to us, awfully, the manner of his early master. Jeromian through and through is the

atmosphere he infuses into the Bloomsbury lodging-house. The lodgers are heterogeneous; yet at every window we seem to see one face—Mr. Jerome's. On every stair we hear one footfall—his. On every peg in the hall his hat is hanging. The haughty aristocrat speaks sharply to the servant-girl, and his friend tells him that there was moisture in her eyes as she turned to go. "So much the better," says the haughty aristocrat, "it will make her face cleaner perhaps." That is perhaps a rather extreme instance; but it is only by extreme instances that a general impression can be briefly conveyed; and I had to justify the deep impression of Jeromism which the play gradually wrought on me. Physical humour, too, in which Mr. Jerome dealt always lavishly, is lavishly dealt in here. One character, in a fit of abstraction, squirts the carpet with a syphon. Another, also in a fit of abstraction, holds the teapot in such a way as to pour out all the tea on the carpet. (It does one's heart good, or ill, to see the audience convulsed by these simple exercises.) And, all the while, Mr. Zangwill is methodically spilling jar after jar of the Golden Syrup aforesaid, and smiling bitterly while the public sprawls and laps it up—sprawls and laps till at length (when the servant-girl has inherited half a million pounds sterling, and has, after an interval of separation, thrown herself into the arms of the erst haughty aristocrat) the public is sated and sent home, smiling a sticky smile of gratitude. The play will run for a very long while—clashing, I hope, with other plays in which Mr. Zangwill will try to give to the stage something of his own remarkable and admirable self.

I have pictured him "smiling bitterly" for the present. I do hope the picture is a true one. But I have my hateful doubts. I am sure that he smiled bitterly when he wrote the play, and, later, when Mr. Frohman jumped at it for the Duke of York's. But human nature is a subtly involved affair. It is quite possible that, in the course of rehearsing the play for production, Mr.

Zangwill gradually lost his sense of aloofness from his work. After all, the play was his. His name would be on the programme. He would be held responsible. And it is nice to have an artistic success. And it is not nice to have an artistic failure. Was there in the play anything really good? Mr. Zangwill (if I am right in my diagnosis of the mood of a dramatist on the eve of a production) eagerly asked himself this question. He tried hard to find a reason for answering himself in the affirmative. For, though a man is ready enough to scoff at his own work, as studied by him in private, with no necessity to show it to any one, he resents that people should scoff at it when he gives it to the world, and is anxious to convince himself that the scoffers—if scoffers there be—will be in the wrong. So he becomes tenderly indulgent to himself. If his work please the many, the many are right; if not, not. If his work displease the few, the few are wrong. "Merely Mary Ann" is giving intense pleasure to the many. I hope I err in my suspicion that Mr. Zangwill sides with them against me. I hope he is grasping me by the hand, stammering heartfelt gratitude and promises of amendment.

LITERARY MEN ON THE STAGE

October 8, 1904.

One speaks of "mixed emotions" as though they were a rather rare and peculiar thing. In point of fact, emotional people—and they are the vast majority of mankind—very seldom have an emotion single and straightforward. One emotion merges automatically into another; and the chances are that these different emotions have no logical connexion. Take, for example, the emotion of pity. Some one has suffered a misfortune. People are very sorry for him. But they are not merely sorry for him: they find themselves also exalting him as a hero. If a man fail publicly and signally, he can always count on being for the moment deified at large. A few months ago I drew your attention to the great enthusiasm evoked by the fact that Mr. George Alexander had produced a play which ran for only four nights. The British press and the British people, smiling through their tears, were immensely proud of Mr. Alexander. They seemed to think that he had done a deed of rarest courage and nobility. And now again they are in just this mood over Mrs. Brown Potter. Only rather more so; for Mrs. Potter has produced a play which she withdrew after only three nights. Pluck? It seems that there never was such a plucky woman. Ascend, madam, to the hierarchy of heroines, and make yourself comfortable between Antigone and Grace Darling. . . . It must be very nice to be an emotional person. My regret for Mrs. Potter's misadventure is unaccompanied by any cheerful sense of her heroism, and so is unmitigated. So much of work and hope and anxiety is involved in every theatrical production that I must

needs be saddened whenever a play fails. If so be that the manager, stonily staring failure in the face and insisting that it is success, proceed to run the play at all hazards, then I have the comfort of being impressed by a display of reckless courage. But if the manager climb quickly down I can merely recognise an act of wisdom. And wisdom is such a tame affair, after all.

One result of Mrs. Potter's alacrity is that I did not see the play. I had secured a ticket for Monday evening; but, when Monday evening came, there was nothing for me to do but sit in my study, from 8.30 to 11 o'clock, trying, with closed eyes, to imagine that the play was being performed before me. I had read some criticisms of it, and I knew that one of the principal characters in it was a literary man. Him, especially, I tried to visualise. Presentments of literary men on the stage are a special hobby of mine. They are always delightful. And I had gathered that this particular one was more than usually delightful. Had Fate been kind enough to let me see the play, I should probably have devoted the greater part of this article to the presentment of the literary man, with some general remarks about literary men on the stage. As it is, I can but make the general remarks.

Partly, no doubt, it is the actors themselves who are responsible. The histrionic and the literary temperaments are of all temperaments furthest asunder. Actors, having so little in common with writers, see as little as possible of them. When an actor cast for the part of a literary man, conscientiously penetrates into literary circles, to observe, he is very much disappointed. He wants a good make-up—something typical and sharply distinctive; and he looks for it in vain. Literary men look so very like other men. Their art, unlike the actor's, stamps no special seal upon their features and their gait. As for costume, and hair-dressing, the modern writer carefully shuns anything in the way of specialism. His dearest ambition is to be mistaken

for a soldier. His ambition is unfulfilled; but he often succeeds in looking rather like a doctor. To make himself up rather like a doctor would be perhaps the most artistic course for an actor in the part of a literary man. But he feels that in the theatre there must be sharp certainty, even at the expense of truth. The audience must recognise him, at sight, as a literary man. How is he to achieve this end? I remember that some years ago, an actor, thus troubled, appealed to me privately and personally. I looked at myself in the glass, vainly. I searched the files of "The Bookman", vainly. All I could advise him to do, at last, was to stain the thumb and forefinger of his right hand with a little ink. I was touched to see, on the first night, that he had taken my advice. For the rest, he wore a jacket of brown velveteen, an Inverness cape, and a soft hat, irregular in shape. His face was painted very white—"sicklied o'er," as he would have said, "with the pale cast of thought." Further symbols of intellect were a pince-nez and a bald brow, behind which some brown hair streamed down upon his shoulders. He looked like nothing that is at present on the face of the earth. He looked rather like our idea of the Bohemians in the 'fifties. And that is just how other actors, in similar case, invariably do look.

Though writers have no hall-mark on their appearance, they do acquire, through practice of their art, a rather distinctive manner. Accustomed to express themselves through a medium wherein there is no place for gesture, or play of features, or modulation of the voice, they become peculiarly passive in their mode of conversation. Obliged in their work to dispense with such adventitious aids, they lose the power to use them in their off moments. But the actor has never detected this obvious peculiarity. At any rate, he does not reproduce it. Impersonating a writer, he behaves with as strenuous an animation as if he were impersonating himself. When a real writer reads aloud to you something that he has written, his calmness, as you must

have noticed, becomes intensified. He drones to you, with half-closed eyes, in an unctuously faint monotone. It is not often that the writer as shown on the stage has an opportunity of reading aloud his own works: usually, his genius is to be taken on trust. But, sometimes, a greatly daring playwright will venture so far as to let him give you a taste of his quality. And then the unreality of him becomes more than ever effulgent. For the actor feels that here is his chance; here is a recitation, to be done for all it is worth. He takes the bit between his teeth, and races forth, with terrific impetus. One of the dearest of my recollections is of a fairly recent play whose hero was a young poet. He was entertaining some friends at his room in the Temple, and they asked him to read them some verses that he had just composed. At first, he demurred. "They are nothing," he said, modestly. They were not, indeed, very much—three stanzas of mildly pretty sentiment; but oh, you should have heard the actor declaim them! He was seated at a table when he began to read, but for the second stanza he rose to his full height, with flashing eyes and dilated chest; and for the third stanza he came down to the footlights, and roared at us like a bull. I shall never forget it.

So much for the actors. We must not forget the playwrights. They, despite the sacred and indissoluble union of literature and the drama, seem to be almost as hazy as actors in their notion of what literary men are like. I search my memory in vain for one passable presentment of a literary man in modern drama. Even in the most obvious and rudimentary part of their task they fail. The sharpest point of superficial difference between a literary man and his fellow-creatures is not the lack of animation in his mode of saying things (for in England animation is always rare), but the fact that what he says differs in form from what his fellow-creatures say. The literary man would like, no doubt, to express himself in conversation with

soldierly abruptness and crypticism; but he cannot help being literary—cannot shake off that lucid formality which is essential to the task of writing. It should be easy enough for a playwright to suggest this manner. And yet he never does suggest it, unless he happens to be a playwright who cannot make any of his characters talk except with literary constructions—in which case the suggestion is valueless. Nor can I remember a modern play in which there was any semblance of truth in the presentment of a literary man's life or mode of work. I can but recall a number of "howlers". In one play—a very clever comedy—a great writer gravely asked his amanuensis if she had yet had time to correct the proofs of his forthcoming book. In another, another great writer said to his wife "Stay! I have an idea for a novel. Wait a moment, while I jot it down." In another a poet of the highest genius was seen at his desk, in the dawn, having completed a poem, all but the rhyme in the last line. This rhyme eluded him. He injected some opium into his wrist, murmuring over and over again

> "The dark waves claim me for their own
> Making murmur with infinite . . ."

"Ah!" he shouted suddenly. "I've captured the little devil at last! I knew I should! 'Making murmur with infinite *moan*'." And so the dignity of the Muse was upheld, and all was well.

Seeing our playwrights' babe-like ignorance of the plainest facts about literary men, one can hardly wonder that in no play has there been any attempt at a study of the literary man's inner soul. I doubt whether any playwright, however discerning, could succeed in presenting a great writer impressively. In the theatre we are so loth to take glorious things on trust. When some character is presented to us as a great explorer, or a victorious general, we don't succumb. We eye him suspiciously. We

want some evidence. The great writer is similarly handicapped. Where are his books? On the other hand, though we are coy of believing in glorious things which cannot be verified, we are quick enough to take on trust absurd things, or even ordinary things. We are willing to believe that a character on the stage is a bad writer, or even a respectable writer. And the literary temperament is a thing not more common among good writers than among bad and indifferent ones. And it is an interesting thing. There ought to be a good play about it. I feel sure there will be one, some day, in Utopia.

AN HORTATION

October 15, 1904.

I SUBSCRIBE to the general opinion that the stage is a rather tragic professon. To fail in the art of acting, which is of all arts the most directly personal to the artist, is a specially bitter experience; and it is, owing to the glamour of the footlights, and to the consequent rush of persons who have no vocation for the art, an experience that falls to the great majority of mimes. I am sorry for the numberless derelicts who, down at heel, daily haunt the Strand in the vague hope of something turning up. Yet it is not in them that I find exemplars of the darkest tragedy of their profession. I think there are deeper depths. My heartiest ruth is reserved for certain highly talented and popular mimes. The deepest depths are, as it were, at the top of the tree.

The long-run system is, in itself, sufficient reason for pitying these ladies and gentlemen. It must be horribly tedious and galling for any person with an active mind to repeat nightly, for weeks and months, a certain series of words written by somebody else. How much worse must it be to enact nightly the same part for years and years! Yet that is the common fate of the successful mime. He will have made his success in one strongly-defined part, and thenceforth the managers will have preferred the certainty of his excellence in one "line" to the chance of his proficiency in another. Perhaps he becomes a manager on his own account. Then it is likely that he, unless his love of art greatly preponderate over his fear of bankruptcy, will take the safe path of monotony. The public likes him as it knows him;

and the public is slow-witted, averse from change, and probably would not accept him, however good he might be, in a new kind of part; and so the poor man immolates himself, and will continue to immolate himself.

Take, for example, poor Mr. Lewis Waller, who produced a new play last week at the Imperial Theatre. Some time ago he began to be very successful as hero of cape and sword. He beat all competitors in that business. None was of mien so gallant and resolute and daring. None's eye and sword flashed so harmoniously. None could rescue with such neatness and despatch a maiden in distress, or render with such coolness, or such violence, unheard-of services to the King, his master, whom Heaven bless. And so the history of the Imperial Theatre under his management consists of "Monsieur Beaucaire", "Ruy Blas", "Miss Elizabeth's Prisoner", and "His Majesty's Servant", with a swashbucklement by the revered Mr. Crockett in the offing. "Always so dashing" was the fond criticism which the maiden lady in "Quality Street" passed on her nephew. Had he ceased to cause her anxiety, she might have forbidden him her door. "Always so dashing," dodders Britannia over Mr. Waller, and he takes the hint. But at what a cost! Imagine the tedium of being always, year in, year out, dashing, and nothing *but* dashing! Nor is it only at nightfall that Mr. Waller's lot seems piteous. Acting is, in a sense, one of the dangerous trades. Psychologists have explained that a man who industriously simulates something must, at length, absorb the simulated thing into his own being. An actor loses imperceptibly, but for ever, a little of his true self, and absorbs a little of an alien self, every time he performs a part. This process would have no ill effects in the case of an actor in a stock company: constant variety in impersonation would give no time for any one radical change in the actor's soul. But Mr. Waller's soul—how much, I wonder, remains of the original article? By this time, Mr. Waller

must almost have lost the power to be anything except gallant and resolute and daring. And this disability must be a source of very great inconvenience for him. The conditions of modern life afford so very little scope for a hero of cape and sword. The time is not out of joint, and by a cursed spite there is no outlet for Mr. Waller's desire to set it right. I picture him sallying every morning from his front-door with flashing eye and swinging gait, all alert and mettlesome for some dread emprise in the service of the right. I picture him pausing suddenly in the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace, and eyeing with eagle glance a mounted policeman who canters by. In another moment there follows a closed carriage, driven at great speed. Mr. Waller's hand flies to the back of the brim of his hat, and he uncovers with a circular sweep. But ah! by Mr. Waller's halidom, the King is in danger—is being spirited somewhither to his hurt by yon varlets. To seize the bridles of the horses, leap through the carriage window, send the treacherous equerry to his last account, shoulder the King and convey him to some place of safety, would be but the work of a moment for Mr. Waller; only . . . Mr. Waller has remembered reality. We leave him standing on the curb in a picturesque attitude, frowning a terrible frown, and wondering how he will get through the day in this drab world, and longing for nightfall and the footlights. Yes, I have no doubt that I was wrong in supposing that Mr. Waller was bored by his own performance on the stage. But I, certainly, am beginning to be bored by it. Heartfelt though it be, it has through infinite repetition the effect of being mechanical. And, since in art one is concerned only with effect, it *is* mechanical. I exhort Mr. Waller to try soon, before it is too late, to give us some other performance. Perhaps he never has done, and never could do, anything so well as what he has done in cape and sword drama. But he has done other things admirably, and might do them so again. I exhort him to a course

of overcoat and umbrella drama. Better be a bankrupt artist than an ever so prosperous machine.

As for the present play, I have nothing to say about it. I do not understand melodrama. For me the excitement of a play consists in the conflict of characters who give me the illusion that they are alive. In melodrama there is no time for this illusion to be wrought. Everything must be sacrificed for a full series of incidents. And whether one lay-figure will be happily betrothed to another lay-figure, or whether a third lay-figure will succeed in intercepting a letter and running a fourth lay-figure through the body, is for me a matter of total indifference. "His Majesty's Servant" may be good—may be bad—of its kind. If you need a verdict, consult some other critic.

DAN LENO

November 5, 1904.

So little and frail a lantern could not long harbour so big a flame. Dan Leno was more a spirit than a man. It was inevitable that he, cast into a life so urgent as is the life of a music-hall artist, should die untimely. Before his memory fades into legend, let us try to evaluate his genius. For mourners there is ever a solace in determining what, precisely, they have lost.

Usually, indisputable pre-eminence in any art comes of some great originative force. An artist stands unchallenged above his fellows by reason of some "new birth" that he has given to his art. Dan Leno, however, was no inaugurator. He did not, like Mr. Albert Chevalier, import into the music-hall a new subject-matter, with a new style. He ended, as he had started, well within the classic tradition. True, he shifted the centre of gravity from song to "patter". But, for the rest, he did but hand on the torch. His theme was ever the sordidness of the lower middle class, seen from within. He dealt, as his forerunners had dealt, and as his successors are dealing, with the "two pair-back", the "pub", the "general store", the "peeler", the "beak", and other such accessories to the life of the all-but-submerged. It was rather a murky torch that he took. Yet, in his hand, how gloriously it blazed, illuminating and warming! All that trite and unlovely material, how new and beautiful it became for us through Dan Leno's genius! Well, where lay the secret of that genius? How came we to be spell-bound?

Partly, without doubt, our delight was in the quality of the things actually said by Dan Leno. No other music-hall artist

threw off so many droll sayings—droll in idea as in verbal expression. Partly, again, our delight was in the way that these things were uttered—in the gestures and grimaces and antics that accompanied them; in fact, in Dan Leno's technique. But, above all our delight was in Dan Leno himself. In every art personality is the paramount thing, and without it artistry goes for little. Especially is it so in the art of acting, where the appeal of personality is so direct. And most especially is it so in the art of acting in a music-hall, where the performer is all by himself upon the stage, with nothing to divert our attention. The moment Dan Leno skipped upon the stage, we were aware that here was a man utterly unlike any one else we had seen. Despite the rusty top hat and broken umbrella and red nose of tradition, here was a creature apart, radiating an ethereal essence all his own. He compelled us not to take our eyes off him, not to miss a word that he said. Not that we needed any compulsion. Dan Leno's was not one of those personalities which dominate us by awe, subjugating us against our will. He was of that other, finer kind: the lovable kind. He had, in a higher degree than any other actor that I have ever seen, the indefinable quality of being sympathetic. I defy any one not to have loved Dan Leno at first sight. The moment he capered on, with that air of wild determination, squirming in every limb with some deep grievance, that must be outpoured, all hearts were his. That face puckered with cares, whether they were the cares of the small shopkeeper, or of the landlady, or of the lodger; that face so tragic, with all the tragedy that is writ on the face of a baby-monkey, yet ever liable to relax its mouth into a sudden wide grin and to screw up its eyes to vanishing point over some little triumph wrested from Fate, the tyrant; that poor little battered personage, so "put upon", yet so plucky, with his squeaking voice and his sweeping gestures; bent but not broken; faint but pursuing; incarnate of the will to live in a

world not at all worth living in—surely all hearts went always out to Dan Leno, with warm corners in them reserved to him for ever and ever.

To the last, long after illness had sapped his powers of actual expression and invention, the power of his personality was unchanged, and irresistible. Even had he not been in his heyday a brilliant actor, and a brilliant wag, he would have thrown all his rivals into the shade. Often, even in his heyday, his acting and his waggishness did not carry him very far. Only mediocrity can be trusted to be always at its best. Genius must always have lapses proportionate to its triumphs. A new performance by Dan Leno was almost always a dull thing in itself. He was unable to do himself justice until he had, as it were, collaborated for many nights with the public. He selected and rejected according to how his jokes, and his expression of them "went"; and his best things came to him always in the course of an actual performance, to be incorporated in all the subsequent performances. When, at last the whole thing had been built up, how perfect a whole it was! Not a gesture, not a grimace, not an inflection of the voice, not a wriggle of the body, but had its significance, and drove its significance sharply, grotesquely, home to us all. Never was a more perfect technique in acting. The technique for acting in a music-hall is of a harder, perhaps finer, kind than is needed for acting in a theatre; inasmuch as the artist must make his effects so much more quickly, and without the aid of any but the slightest "properties" and scenery, and without the aid of any one else on the stage. It seemed miraculous how Dan Leno contrived to make you see before you the imaginary persons with whom he conversed. He never stepped outside himself, never imitated the voices of his interlocutors. He merely repeated, before making his reply, a few words of what they were supposed to have said to him. Yet there they were, as large as life, before us. Having this perfect

independence in his art—being thus all-sufficient to himself—Dan Leno was, of course, seen to much greater advantage in a music-hall than at Drury Lane. He was never "in the picture" at Drury Lane. He could not play into the hands of other persons on the stage, nor could they play into his. And his art of suggestion or evocation was nullified by them as actualities. Besides, Drury Lane was too big for him. It exactly fitted Mr. Herbert Campbell, with his vast size and his vast method. But little Dan Leno, with a technique exactly suited to the size of the average music-hall, had to be taken, as it were, on trust.

Apart from his personality and his technique, Dan Leno was, as I have said, a sayer of richly grotesque things. He had also a keen insight into human nature. He knew thoroughly, outside and inside, the types that he impersonated. He was always "in the character", whatever it might be. And yet if you repeat to any one even the best things that he said, how disappointing is the result! How much they depended on the sayer and the way of saying! I have always thought that the speech over Yorick's skull would have been much more poignant if Hamlet had given Horatio some specific example of the way in which the jester had been wont to set the table on a roar. We ought to have seen Hamlet convulsed with laughter over what he told, and Horatio politely trying to conjure up the ghost of a smile. This would have been good, not merely as pointing the tragedy of a jester's death, but also as illustrating the tragic temptation that besets the jester's contemporaries to keep his memory green. I suppose we shall, all of us, insist on trying to give our grandchildren some idea of Dan Leno at his best. We all have our especially cherished recollection of the patter of this or that song. I think I myself shall ever remember Dan Leno more vividly and affectionately as the shoemaker than as anything else. The desperate hopefulness with which he adapted his manner to his different customers! One of his customers was a

lady with her little boy. Dan Leno, skipping forward to meet her, with a peculiar skip invented specially for his performance, suddenly paused, stepped back several feet in one stride, eyeing the lady in wild amazement. He had never seen such a lovely child. *How* old, did the mother say? Three? He would have guessed seven at least—"except when I look at you, ma'am, and then I should say he was one at most." Here Dan Leno bent down, one hand on each knee, and began to talk some unimaginable kind of baby-language. . . . A little pair of red boots with white buttons? Dan Leno skipped towards an imaginary shelf; but, in the middle of his skip, he paused, looked back, as though drawn by some irresistible attraction, and again began to talk to the child. As it turned out, he had no boots of the kind required. He plied the mother with other samples, suggested this and that, faintlier and faintlier, as he bowed her out. For a few moments he stood gazing after her, with blank disappointment, still bowing automatically. Then suddenly he burst out into a volley of deadly criticisms on the child's personal appearance, ceasing as suddenly at the entrance of another customer. . . . I think I see some of my readers—such of them as never saw Dan Leno in this part—raising their eyebrows. Nor do I blame them. Nor do I blame myself for failing to recreate that which no howsoever ingenious literary artist could recreate for you. I can only echo the old heart-cry "Si ipsum audissetis!" Some day, no doubt, the phonograph and the bioscope will have been so adjusted to each other that we shall see and hear past actors and singers as well as though they were alive before us. I wish Dan Leno could have been thus immortalised. No actor of our time deserved immortality so well as he.

MR. SHAW AT HIS BEST

November 12, 1904.

Had Mr. Shaw been born in France, or in Germany, he would be at this moment the most popular playwright in Paris, or in Berlin. There is not the shadow of a doubt of that. As it is, he is becoming popular in Berlin. In New York he is popular already. Another decade will, with luck, see him popular in London. Meanwhile, I suppose, we must be grateful that his plays do manage to get themselves performed, somehow, somewhere, on the sly. During the past two weeks there have been some matinées of his latest play, "John Bull's Other Island", at the Court Theatre. It seemed natural that the auditorium had not been warmed on the bitterly cold day when I found myself there. But the temperature made me feel rather anxious; for in England, a country whose natural breed is dullards, any intellectual activity—and it is only the actively intellectual persons who go out of their way to special matinées—generally carries with it some grave physical delicacy; and we cannot spare aught of such intellectual activity as is going on among us. A man might die worse than in seeing a play by Mr. Shaw. But it seems a pity that he should not live to tell the tale. Moreover, I am quite sure that if Mr. Shaw's plays were more seductively produced, they would appeal even to the dullards at large. In a warm theatre, within the regular radius for theatres, after nightfall—in fact, with just those cheerful commercial circumstances which are withheld from them—these plays would soon take the town. The dull middleman shakes his head, mutters some dull shibboleth, dives his hand into a pigeon-

hole, and calls rehearsals of a new play which has nothing whatever to recommend it except its likeness to the present failure, and to the last failure, and to the failure before last.

The critics, for the most part, are scarcely less dull than the managers themselves. Over "John Bull's Other Island" they have raised their usual parrot-cry: "Not a play." This, being interpreted, means "Not a love-story, split neatly up into four brief acts, with no hint that the characters live in a world where other things besides this love-story are going on." In "John Bull's Other Island" there is a love-story. But it occurs only in the fabric of the main scheme. This main scheme is to present the character of a typical Englishman against a typically Irish background—to throw up the peculiarities of the Englishman by contrast with various types of Irishman and various phases of Irish life, and to throw up the peculiarities of Ireland by contrast with the invader. This scheme Mr. Shaw carries out in four long acts, two of which contain two scenes apiece. Not much actually happens in the play. The greater part of the play is talk: and this talk is often not relevant to the action, but merely to the characters, and to things in general. Pray, why is this not to be called a play? Why should the modern "tightness" of technique be regarded as a sacred and essential part of dramaturgy? And why should the passion of love be regarded as the one possible theme in dramaturgy? Between these two superstitions lies the main secret of the bareness of modern British drama. The first of them wards away the majority of men of creative literary power, who cannot be bothered to pick up the manifold little tricks and dodges which go to the making of what the critics call "a play". The second prevents playwrights from taking themes which would both invigorate their work through novelty and bring the theatre into contact with life at large.

Of course, I do not pretend that every good novelist could

write a good play. There are essential differences between dramaturgy and any other form of literary work. My contention is that the dramatic instinct is no more rare than the narrative instinct, and that any man who has the dramatic instinct will, with a little practice, be able to write a good play. It is lucky for us that Mr. Shaw has not, like the vast majority of creative writers, been frightened away from the theatre. He has—though not, I wager, in a greater degree than many other men who dare only write novels—an instinct for the theatre, and he can with perfect ease express his ideas effectively through the dramatic form. None of our most fashionable playwrights could give him points in such technique as is really necessary. None is less amateurish in essentials. Mr. Shaw evolves his "situations" with perfect naturalness, and brings his characters off and on, and handles a whole crowd of them simultaneously on the stage, without the least apparent effort. He has, also, this great natural advantage in the writing of dialogue: he can always express himself directly, in a clean-cut manner. He is a thinker, and often a very subtle thinker. But he is also a public speaker, accustomed to dispense with that form in which his thoughts can be pondered at leisure, and to make the best of that form in which they must be caught as they fly. From the stage, then, as from the platform, his thoughts never elude us. We never have to pause to consider what he meant in the last line. It is always well to read a play by him at leisure, when it is published as a book; for the thoughts in it fly too thickly for us to remember them all after a performance. But at the moment of its utterance his every thought flies straight to our brain. As his thoughts are, so (I apologise for the arbitrary distinction) are his jests. His humour always gets well across the footlights, even when the fun of the thing said derives nothing from the character of its sayer or from the moment in which it is said. Thus, when Broadbent, the English

Liberal candidate in Ireland, talks to his Irish fiancée about the canvassing, and is met by her reluctance to talk to "common people," he cries "Oh, but we must be thoroughly democratic, and patronise everybody without distinction of class." That is not even a caricature of anything that Broadbent would say. It is just a critical conceit of Mr. Shaw's. It is, therefore, not stage-humour, in the strict sense. But it is stage-humour in so far as it is so delightfully simple and sudden—a joke which not a soul in the audience can miss. However, these detached jests are rare in Mr. Shaw's play. Most of the fun comes of a slight exaggeration on the things that the character actually would say. But Mr. Shaw has also the art of extracting a ridiculous effect from every scenic situation. Broadbent has been selected as candidate quite unexpectedly, and on the spur of the moment. His valet has not heard the news. "Now, Hodson," says Broadbent, "you mustn't be standoffish with the people here. I should like you to be popular, you know." "I'm sure you're very kind, Sir," says Hodson; "but it don't seem to matter much whether they like me or not. I'm not going to stand for Parliament here, Sir." "Well," replies Broadbent, dramatically, "I am." This passage is not excruciatingly funny to read. But it is, as any one with dramatic instinct can imagine, excruciatingly funny to hear. Again, I might describe for you the scene in which Broadbent suddenly, by moonlight, makes his proposal of marriage, and is supposed by the young Irish lady to be intoxicated, and is by her converted to that uncomfortable belief, and led gently home by her; or I might describe the scene in which Broadbent drives away with a peasant's pig in his motor; but these descriptions would seem to me tame in comparison with the actual thing. There you have one of the tests of true dramatic humour: the inadequacy of pen and ink for a proper reproduction of it. Of all our playwrights Mr. Shaw is by far the most richly gifted with this humour. And

of all his plays "John Bull's Other Island" is fullest of this humour. Yet none of our managers, gloomily hovering around Portugal Street, will offer the play to a public against which the obvious (and self-made) indictment is that it goes to the theatre just to be amused.

"Just to be amused." There is much besides amusement to be got out of this play (a fact which would, I suppose, form the manager's silly excuse for not producing it). Indeed, I think that none of Mr. Shaw's plays has so much serious interest. From all his plays one derives the pleasure that there is in finding a playwright who knows, and gives us, something of the world at first hand—a playwright who, moreover, has a philosophic view of things, and can criticise what he sees. Such displeasure as we have in Mr. Shaw's plays comes from the sense that Mr. Shaw is a little too sure of himself and his philosophy—a little too loudly consistent about everything to be right about most things. In this latest play of his, he seems to have mellowed into something almost like dubiety, without losing anything of his genius for ratiocination. He himself figures largely, as usual; this time in the person of Laurence Doyle, a disillusioned Irishman. But he does not have it all so signally his own way. Indeed, he is altogether put in the shade by an unfrocked priest, a mystic, who touches a note of visionary wisdom that makes every other character seem cheap and absurd. However, the principal motive of the play is not to give us the philosophy of this mystic, or Mr. Shaw's philosophy, but to give us Broadbent, the Englishman, just as he is. Certainly, Mr. Shaw never created so perfect a type as Broadbent. Some years ago, in "Cæsar and Cleopatra", he gave us a person named Britannus, illustrating the peculiarities of the modern Englishman against an antique Roman background. But Britannus, albeit delightful, was only a sketch. Broadbent is a full-length portrait, minutely finished; and,

moreover, the figure stands out more sharply against modern Ireland than Britannus' figure stood out against Rome, inasmuch as the modern Englishman is more akin to the ancient Roman than to the modern Irishman. Broadbent in business, Broadbent in politics, Broadbent in love, Broadbent in all the various relations of life, is certainly Mr. Shaw's masterpiece of observation and of satire. The satire is the more deadly by reason of (what Broadbent would call) the "conspicuous fairness" with which it is accomplished. Mr. Shaw sees all Broadbent's good points, and lays stress on everything that is not absurd in him. The tone is always kindly, even affectionate. We are quite sure that justice is being done. Fullest justice; and so—poor Broadbent! All Englishmen ought to see Broadbent. No Englishman could deny the truth of Broadbent. Indeed, no thoroughbred Englishman would wish to deny the truth of Broadbent. That is the cream of the joke.

THE CHILD BARRIE

January 7, 1905.

"Peter Pan; or," adds Mr. Barrie, "The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up." And he himself is that boy. That child, rather; for he halted earlier than most of the men who never come to maturity—halted before the age when soldiers and steam-engines begin to dominate the soul. To remain, like Mr. Kipling, a boy, is not at all uncommon. But I know not any one who remains, like Mr. Barrie, a child. It is this unparalleled achievement that informs so much of Mr. Barrie's later work, making it unique. This, too, surely, it is that makes Mr. Barrie the most fashionable playwright of his time.

Undoubtedly, "Peter Pan" is the best thing he has done—the thing most directly from within himself. Here, at last, we see his talent in its full maturity; for here he has stripped off from himself the last flimsy remnants of a pretence to maturity. Time was when a tiny pair of trousers peeped from under his "short-coats", and his sunny curls were parted and plastered down, and he jauntily affected the absence of a lisp, and spelt out the novels of Mr. Meredith and said he liked them very much, and even used a pipe for another purpose than that of blowing soap-bubbles. But all this while, bless his little heart, he was suffering. It would have been pleasant enough to play at being grown-up among children of his own age. It was a fearful strain to play at being grown-up among grown-up persons. But he was forced to do this, because the managers of theatres, and the publishers of books, would have been utterly dumbfounded if he had asked them to take him as he was. The

public, for all its child-worship, was not yet ripe for things not written ostensibly by adults. The managers, the publishers, the public, had to be educated gradually. A stray curl or two, now and again, an infrequent soap-bubble between the fumes—that was as much as could be adventured just at first. Time passed, and mankind was lured, little by little, to the point when it could fondly accept Mr. Barrie on his own terms. The tiny trousers were slipped off, and under the toy-heap were thrust the works of Mr. Meredith. And every one sat around, nodding and smiling to one another rather fatuously, and blessing the little heart of Mr. Barrie. All was not yet well, though—not perfectly well. By force of habit, the child occasionally gave itself the airs of an adult. There were such moments even in "Little Mary". Now, at last, we see at the Duke of York's Theatre Mr. Barrie in his quiddity undiluted—the child in a state of nature, unabashed—the child, as it were, in its bath, splashing, and crowing as it splashes.

The first of all the differences between a child's mind and an adult's is the vividness and abundance of a child's fancy. Silently in solitude, or orally among its peers, a child can weave an endless web of romance around itself and around all things. As a child grows into boyhood, this delicate faculty is dimmed. Manhood, in most cases, destroys it utterly. For, as we come to manhood, the logical side of our brain is developed; and the faculty for logic is ever foe to the faculty for romance. It is only in our sleep, when the logical side of the brain is at rest, that the romantic side is at liberty to assert itself. In our dreams we are still fluently romantic, fertile in curious invention. In our dreams romance rises up, laughing, to lord it over logic who lords it over her all day long. She laughs, and leads him a dance all through the night. Sometimes, if we wake suddenly in the night, so suddenly that we remember a dream clearly, logic in us is forced to admit that romance is no mere

madcap—that there is, at least, a method in her madness, and that, as man to woman, he is no match for her at her best. Yes, sometimes, remembering a dream, we marvel at the verisimilitude of it, marvel at the soundness of invention in the dialogue that we were waging, or in the adventure that had befallen us. And, with a sigh, we confess that we could not compass consciously so admirable an effect. Even when, as usually happens, the remembered dream is but a tissue of foolishness, how amusing the foolishness is! Why cannot we be amusingly foolish in the manifold follies of our hours of vigil? On the whole, certainly, our minds work to better effect when we sleep than when we wake. Why cannot we sleep for ever? Or, since the mind of a man sleeping is equivalent to a child's mind, why cannot we be for ever children? It is only the man of genius who never experiences this vain regret—never hankers after childhood, with all its material and moral discomforts, for sake of the spiritual magic in it. For the man of genius is that rare creature in whom imagination, not ousted by logic in full growth, abides, uncramped, in unison with full-grown logic. Mr. Barrie is not that rare creature, a man of genius. He is something even more rare—a child who, by some divine grace, can express through an artistic medium the childishness that is in him.

Our dreams are nearer to us than our childhood, and it is natural that "Peter Pan" should remind us more instantly of our dreams than of our childish fancies. One English dramatist, a man of genius, realised a dream for us; but the logic in him prevented him from indulging in that wildness and incoherence which are typical of all but the finest dreams. Credible and orderly are the doings of Puck in comparison with the doings of Peter Pan. Was ever, out of dreamland, such a riot of inconsequence and of exquisite futility? Things happen in such wise that presently one can conceive nothing that might

not conceivably happen, nor anything that one would not, as in a dream, accept unhesitatingly. Even as in a dream, there is no reason why the things should ever cease to happen. What possible conclusion can inhere in them? The only possible conclusion is from without. The sun shines through the bedroom window, or there is a tapping at the bedroom door, or—some playgoers must catch trains, others must sup. Even as you, awakened, turn on your pillow, wishing to pursue the dream, so, as you leave the Duke of York's, will you rebel at the dream's rude and arbitrary ending, and will try vainly to imagine what other unimaginable things were in store for you. For me to describe to you now in black and white the happenings in "Peter Pan" would be a thankless task. One cannot communicate the magic of a dream. People who insist on telling their dreams are among the terrors of the breakfast table. You must go to the Duke of York's, there to dream the dream for yourselves.

The fact that Mr. Barrie is a child would be enough, in this generation which so adores children, to account for his unexampled vogue. But Mr. Barrie has a second passport. For he, too, even pre-eminently, adores children—never ceases to study them and their little ways, and to purr sentimental pæans over them, and finds it even a little hard to remember that the world really does contain a sprinkling of adults. In fact, his attitude towards children is the fashionable attitude, struck more saliently by him than by any one else, and with more obvious sincerity than by the average person. It is not to be wondered at that his preoccupation with children endears him to the community. The strange thing is the preoccupation itself. It forces me to suppose that Mr. Barrie has, after all, to some extent, grown up. For children are the last thing with which a child concerns itself. A child takes children as a matter of course, and passes on to more important things—remote things that have a glorious existence in the child's imagination. A little

boy does not say "I am a child," but "I am a pirate," or "a greengrocer," or "an angel," as the case may be. A little girl does not say "I am a little girl, and these are my dolls, and this is my baby-brother," but "I am the mother of this family." She lavishes on her dolls and on her baby-brother a wealth of maternal affection, cooing over them, and . . . stay! that is just Mr. Barrie's way. I need not, after all, mar by qualification my theory that Mr. Barrie has never grown up. He is still a child, absolutely. But some fairy once waved a wand over him, and changed him from a dear little boy into a dear little girl. Some critics have wondered why among the characters in "Peter Pan" appeared a dear little girl, named in the programme "Liza (the Author of the Play)". Now they know. Mr. Barrie was just "playing at symbolists".

MR. SUTRO'S NEW PLAY

February 18, 1905.

The homilist, or setter-to-rights, is a very familiar figure in modern comedy. Who shall number Sir Charles Wyndham's impersonations of him? Who shall number the dramatic complications that he has unravelled, the rough places that he has made smooth, the foolish actions that he has, by his ripe knowledge of men and women, and by his irresistible personal magnetism, prevented in the nick of time, the true lovers that he has united, the all-but-erring wives that he has restored to their husbands? We all know him. We are all impressed by his easy yet judicial manner of listening to a man's account of a quandary. How apt are the questions he interpolates from moment to moment! How significant his "H'm. Go on!" How very sound the advice that he presently delivers, usually concluding with "My dear fellow, leave it all to *me!*" And then, his management of the lady in question—of any number of little ladies in question! He reads them like a book. Nothing in their fluttering hearts is dark to him. He puts them perfectly at their ease. He seems to agree, in theory, with every word they say. He merely insinuates the suggestion of other views to be taken, other courses to be pursued. But the insinuation, as made by him, is enough. He has sown the seed: the flower follows. His advice is followed to the letter, and all turns out exactly as he, and we under his guidance, had foreseen. And all, needless to say, is well.

Now, I take it that in real life no man has personal magnetism to such a degree that, if he went through life minding other

people's business, and instructing every one exactly how his or her business ought to be transacted, he would not be politely asked to leave whatever house he set foot in. Further, I take it that in real life no man has so perfect a combination of acumen and luck that every human "case" undertaken by him would turn out exactly as he intended it to turn out. In fact, I regard our friend the stage-homilist as a fraud. And I have often wished that some satiric playwright would come and prick the bubble—show the homilist annihilated by the proved fact that his diagnoses had been incorrect, his advice absurd, his stratagems clumsy, and his general effect disastrous to all around him. "Mollentrave on Women", at the S. James' Theatre, is therefore very welcome to me. The bubble is pricked at last. It is true that Mr. Sutro does not show the homilist consciously annihilated. I, who have been so long exasperated by the homilist, would like to see him really suffering. But I am ready to admit that Mr. Sutro's subtler way of dealing with him is perhaps more really unkind. Mollentrave has not the sense to understand even his own senselessness. Having complacently complicated the quite simple affairs of his friends, having seen all his predictions falsified and all his plans miscarry, he is left at the end of the play preening himself on the fact that all has come out well—all having come out well quite accidentally, of course, and in despite of his well-meant efforts.

In Mollentrave Mr. Sutro has directed good satire not merely against a tiresome stage-figure. There are such homilists in real life, too. There really are persons who, studying humanity from a scientific standpoint, and classifying it into various genera and species, pretend to be able to say what such and such a person will do in such and such given circumstances, and are fatuously eager to be consulted in human crises. And these poor pedants pretend to wisdom especially in regard to women. The more incalculable their material the more blithely

calculating are they. They are an admirable target for the comic spirit.

"A Comedy" Mr. Sutro calls his play. But it is not really that. "A Philosophic Farce" would be a much better description of it. In a comedy the characters presented are taken from real life without sharp exaggeration, and the incidents are just such as might quite likely be experienced in real life. Mollentrave is a very sharp exaggeration of a type. There's no fool like an old fool, but not even the eldest fool in real life would pretend to such formal and final omniscience in psychology as is pretended to by Mollentrave. Nor is the course of events in the play at all natural or credible. A middle-aged man, Sir Joseph Balsted, has a female ward, whose presence in the house is irksome to him. She is secretly loved by a young man of her own age, but is herself secretly in love with Balsted. Mollentrave, of course, supposes her to be pining for her coæval, and determines to ease Balsted by bringing the young couple together. Having made the young man acknowledge his feelings, he proceeds to convey the offer of marriage to the girl. But he does his work so clumsily that she imagines that the proposal comes from Balsted. Now, in real life, the simplest thing in the world would be for Balsted to explain the mistake. There, in real life, would be an end of the matter. But in the play Balsted allows Mollentrave to insist on a ludicrous scheme, by which the girl's affection shall be gradually alienated. The total failure of this ludicrous scheme to alienate the girl, and its success in deepening her passion, is the staple of the whole subsequent story. The whole play is founded on an impossibility, and its details are worked out with a conscious disregard of likelihood—with a conscious straining after sheer absurdity. In fact, the play is a farce. I have no objection to that. The scientific expert in affairs of the heart might be well satirised through comedy. But comedy is not the only good means of satirising him. Farce is in itself an equally

good medium. All that matters is whether Mr. Sutro has the instinct for satirical farce. Offhand, I should have supposed that he had not the requisite high-spirits. Mr. Arthur Bourchier is still angry with me, insomuch that I have not seen Mr. Sutro's play at the Garrick Theatre. But I gather from hearsay that it is a very strenuous piece of work. Nor would Mr. Sutro's pious labour in the cause of Maeterlinck predispose me to expect of him a genius for farce. Nor, especially, would my memory of a powerful little tragic play which he published some years ago as a book. However, perhaps in none of these fruits of his activity was to be found the true soul of Mr. Sutro. Into "Mollentrave on Women", again, he may not have infused his true soul. Farce may not be his true bent. But no matter. Enough that he seems to have a very real spontaneous instinct for farce. His high-spirits seem quite unforced, and he has an unflagging inventiveness in absurdities. "Mollentrave on Women" is great fun, from first to last. It would be well worth seeing even if it had no serious satire in it. But the fact that it is a serious satire, and that every part of it is carefully correlated to the satirical idea, does not make it the less a farce.

Every one who has read the translations of Maeterlinck's plays knows that Mr. Sutro has a nice sense for words and for cadences—a real gift for literary expression. In writing farce he has, therefore, an advantage that he would not have in writing comedy: he can give full rein to his talent for writing. In farce the characters need not talk a natural oral language. Additional fun may be compassed by making them talk like books. Usually farces are written (and, for that matter, so are the other kinds of play) by persons of no literary talent whatever. In avoiding colloquialism, and straining after some sort of classicism, the average writer of farce achieves only stodginess. "Mollentrave on Women" is distinguished by real grace and charm of dialogue. It is not merely the work of a man who knows our language

thoroughly. (Scholars are often quite incompetent writers.) It is the work of a man who knows how to use our language, and who is revelling in an opportunity for using it.

On the first night, certainly, the performers spoke their lines too hurriedly. They did not give full scope to the dignity of the words, and so did not get the full fun out of them. Otherwise, they were mostly admirable. The part of Mollentrave is, as I have said, a twofold satire. To get the full effect of it in so far as it satirises a familiar stage-type, the part ought, of course, to be played by Sir Charles Wyndham. But, in so far as it satirises a type in real life—and this, after all, is its more important function—it could not be played more admirably than Mr. Eric Lewis plays it. This is the first time I have seen Mr. Lewis playing the principal part in a play. I should not have been surprised at being disappointed. For Mr. Lewis' method in acting is not unlike that of the pointilliste in painting. He makes his every effect, as it were, dot by dot. While he is acting you are always conscious of his method in art. It is only afterwards that the figure impersonated by him stands out in memory as a perfect whole, just as it is only when you retreat a few steps that a pointilliste canvas resolves itself into a picture. Pointillisme in painting is a method that can only be well applied to small canvases. By analogy, I should have feared that Mr. Lewis would not be at his best in a large part. Yet there can be no doubt of his triumph as Mollentrave. With sure artistic sense, he has widened and loosened his method in proportion to the space he has to fill. Miss Marion Terry was charming in a small part. Mr. Faber, as the young man in love with Balsted's ward, acted with real sense of humour. And all the other parts had been well cast, except the part of Balsted. I cannot imagine why Mr. Alexander did not cast himself for it. Mr. Norman McKinnel is an actor whom I have often thought excellent in parts that need gravity and force. Balsted, I admit, is

not a light weight. But in a farce even the heaviest character must be played with a light hand. The audience must not feel that the actor is grimly in earnest. They ought to feel that he is consciously contributing to the fun. Mr. McKinnel is very grimly in earnest. He handles the fun as though it were tragedy's own toughest stuff. A blacksmith in a pastrycook's shop could hardly be more amiss.

"THE THIEVES' COMEDY"

April 1, 1905.

British drama is a thing rather of the future than of the present. It is a matter of seeds rather than of blossoms. I hope to see, within a generation, blossoms all over the town. Meanwhile, it is chiefly in Sloane Square that I find the seeds. Little and devious though the Court Theatre may seem to one who regards it in a purely materialistic light, it is to the eye of imagination the least insignificant theatre in London, and is of all our theatres the nearest to the vital centre of things. The little seeds sown there, sometimes by the Stage Society, sometimes by Mr. Vedrenne and Mr. Barker, matter far more than all the gorgeous parterres of blossoms displayed elsewhere. For those blossoms are of wax—wax with nothing but fresh coats of paint to hide its antiquity, and with nothing at all to disguise its unreality. British blossoms, no doubt; and the seeds at the Court Theatre are mostly imported from abroad. But a natural exotic is better than a blossom of home-made wax. And it is a thing to be valued not merely for its own sake: it is valuable also by reason of the good effects that are likely—are sure—to come of it. It would be gratifying to feel that we needed no examples in dramatic art. But that we do need them is obvious. It is also obvious that we might, once we had taken a start, develop a drama quite as good as the modern drama of (let us say) Germany. Outside dramatic art, we have writters of greater distinction than any writers in Germany; nor is our crop likely to languish. As for audiences, there is no reason to suppose that German citizens are on a higher level of intelli-

gence than our own citizens. The mischief is this: whilst in Germany the drama is taken seriously, and the citizens go to the theatre with their wits about them, in England the theatre is regarded simply as a place for fatuousness. If the British drama became a serious drama (and, need I say? seriousness does not connote dulness—does not, indeed, exclude the most rollicking fun), then, you may be sure, British citizens would patronise it in an appropriate frame of mind. The way to set about creating a serious drama is to attract to dramaturgy the talented writers who now hold aloof, supposing that dramaturgy is a kind of dark magic which only a very few peculiar persons can master (and they only by life-long devotion to it), and that in no case could it be made a medium for the expression of anything but crude artificiality. Such a play as "The Thieves' Comedy" (a translation from Hauptmann's "Biberpelz") is a salutary refutation of these fallacies. I trust that you have already gone to see it, and to profit by it. If not, there are matinées next Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. You might do worse than go to all three.

The play is solely a play of character and (to use a wickedly overworked word which I would gladly spare) "atmosphere". It has no story. It has but a few anecdotes, similar to each other, peeping out here and there from a presentment of uneventful everyday life. Frau Wolff, a peasant, steals a deer from the neighbouring forest. That is one anecdote. Here is another: Frau Wolff makes her husband steal some logs of wood that lie stacked outside the house where her daughter is employed as servant. A third anecdote is that a fur-coat is stolen, at Frau Wolff's instigation, from a certain Herr Kruger, and is sold by her to a pilot, who has acted as her "fence" in other thefts. Nothing much happens. Frau Wolff is not found out. The pilot is not found out. They easily bamboozle the local magistrate. They may be found out later. The play has no really conclusive

end, just as it has no really initial beginning. It is but an arbitrary intrusion on a cottage interior, made with the sole intent that we shall have a good look at the inmates; and, so soon as we have had a sufficiently good look, out we go again, leaving them just as we found them. The play, which was a very great success in Germany, differs from the fashionable British play in that its technique is very loose and simple, whilst the technique necessary to a fashionable British play is very tight and artificial. An old-fashioned British critic (the fashionable one has forged far ahead of the fashion in drama) would probably say that Hauptmann had no technique at all. This, of course, would be a mistake. To make a set of characters reveal themselves naturally on the stage is a task that involves a considerable amount of technical skill. But certainly it is not so hard and frightening and esoteric a task as to invent and carry through a whole evening a single story, with a series of sharp climaxes occurring at regular intervals, and with a slick solution to finish up with. It is because the power to do that can only be acquired through years of study, supplementing a natural aptitude which is very rare indeed, that the vast majority of our best men give dramaturgy so wide a berth, leaving it almost entirely in the hands of men who, if they devoted to any other kind of writing such intellect and knowledge of life and sense of style as they possess, would fall somewhere between the twentieth and the twenty-fifth rank. In "The Thieves' Comedy" there is no technique that might not be acquired by any man of active and adaptable mind. What makes the play remarkable and delightful is Hauptmann's humour, and his knowledge of a certain phase in actual life, and his sense of human character. There are among us many writers not less well equipped in these respects than Hauptmann. Let them take courage of his success. Peculiarly local though his characters are, and much as they must lose through being interpreted in the

English language by English ladies and gentlemen, "The Thieves' Comedy" is undoubtedly a success here, inasmuch as nobody seeing it—nobody, of however mean an intelligence—can fail to be amused and interested by it. How much greater the chance of success for a similar play about life in England!

Of the company engaged at the Court Theatre almost every one makes a "hit". The reason is simple. Every part is a good part. Every character has been drawn, with a sure hand, from life itself. Every character is real, life-sized, full-blooded. People often complain of the dearth of trustworthy mimes in England. The answer is that so few of our mimes are entrusted with anything. Bricks can be made without straw; but the task ought not to be set. A mime may, by dint of creative genius, infuse life into a dummy part. But let us not condemn our mimes generally as worthless because they cannot all so far transcend what may reasonably be expected of them as to make good the deficiencies in what may reasonably be expected of dramatists. It is quite true that our mimes are inferior to the Latins in some respects. They do not, nowadays, declaim verse so well. That is because the tradition of declamation has been lost. Let the tradition be found again, and all will be well. Our mimes never will, on the other hand, equal the Latins in display of passionate emotion, or in lightness of comedic touch. The reasons are that we are not by nature passionately emotional (or, at any rate, are averse from expressing our feelings), and that lightness of touch is not one of our national characteristics. But the art of acting does not depend wholly on lightness or on violence. It depends also on many other qualities; and in these qualities our mimes, when they have a chance, show themselves to be as well endowed as any mimes elsewhere. It is difficult, always, to apportion praise or blame justly between the dramatist and his interpreter. I have often heard this or that mime complain, and justify his complaint, that he has been contemned for not achieving that

which the dramatist had given him no chance of achieving. I do not think I ever heard a mime complain of not having been contemned for not having taken chances which the dramatist had offered him. But I have heard many a mime make this complaint in reference to many another mime. A good part: good notices from the critics, however bad the performance. A bad part, however well played: that absence of gush, or that modified gush, which is the critics' nearest approach to blame. Such is the view of "the profession"; and it is, I fear, a true one. I commend it to my colleagues, for general consideration. Meanwhile, I am wondering how much credit is really due to the mimes in this particular instance at the Court Theatre. Miss Rosina Filippi, above them all, triumphs. How much of that triumph is due to Hauptmann, how much to herself? Could any actress have failed in a character so fully and so truly created as Frau Wolff has been by Hauptmann created? Could any actress have got more out of that character—realised it more fully? Could any other actress than Miss Filippi have taken so firm a grasp of it, and of us? To the last two questions I am bound to reply that I think not. So, when all deductions have been made over to Hauptmann, Miss Filippi has still a really very good notice indeed. Mr. James Hearn, as the husband of Frau Wolff, and Miss Sydney Fairbrother, as a little daughter of Frau Wolff, and Mr. Edmund Gwenn, as the pilot, and indeed all the members of the cast, have very good notices, too. All understand their several characters, and make (so far as I can judge) the most of them. Yet none tries to triumph singly at the expense of the others. All are in the picture. A signal virtue, this; and especially needful here, in a play which is so like an actual picture.

A ROMEO ON THE HUSTLE

April 29, 1905.

I HAVE no wish to see a perfect production of "Romeo and Juliet"; for I make it a rule to have no wishes that may not one day be fulfilled. There never can be even a satisfactory production of an English play whose theme is the fierce passion of love in extreme youth. For this theme is a thing which does not exist in England. In Italy, whence it was by Shakespeare borrowed, it does exist. But the climates of the two countries are very different. In England the fire of love takes a long time to burn up. The fuel is well laid, but damp. Vague, timid, sentimental, are the loves of the English adolescent. Physical desire, and its gratification, linger at a polite distance from spiritual exaltation. It is only in the prime of life that the spiritual and physical elements come into partnership. It is only then that a man is capable of being fully in love, as were Romeo and Juliet with each other. Consequently, an English girl and boy could not be adequate as Juliet and Romeo. They could only guess at the sort of thing demanded of them: nor, even if they guessed at it shrewdly, would they be able to express it naturally. It has often been said that no actress can play Juliet till she has ceased to look the part, inasmuch as the part is a heavy one, needing such technique as can be acquired only through very wide experience. The same remark applies equally to Romeo. But the impossibility of getting a good girl-Juliet and a good boy-Romeo lies deeper, as I suggest, than in the matter of mere technique: it lies in the very souls of the boy-actor and the girl-actress. A man and a woman will serve

the purpose better. But only in the sense that they will fail less signally. It is not only a question of their appearance: their souls, too, will be found wanting. They can show us the mutual full love of man and woman. But just what Shakespeare shows to us, when we read his play—this, unhappily, and inevitably, they cannot show to us. For the first awakening of love in a mature bosom—a very beautiful phenomenon though it be—is not the same beautiful phenomenon as love's first awakening in adolescence. And it is only the former phenomenon that can be represented on the stage by an English man and woman. In Italy, where acting is a natural art, and technique is learned quickly and by instinct, we might see a very Romeo and a very Juliet, perhaps. But Shakespeare in a translation—I thank you: no. It is better to muddle along with the original.

I have not seen, and may never see, a better Juliet than Miss Evelyn Millard. In appearance she is an exception to prove the famous rule which I have quoted. And she has grace, and tenderness, and gaiety, and a very real pathos. To passion, however, she does not surrender herself. If she did so surrender her English self, we should instantly be conscious of her as a woman, and should lose our sense of Juliet as a girl. But a rather dispassionate Juliet is not, I need hardly say, the very Juliet. On the other hand, there is nothing dispassionate about Mr. Waller. He will barter nothing for boyishness, not he! He is frankly and sternly (as, indeed, he always is, and was, and will be) rooted in the prime of life. And he is frankly and sternly rooted in love with Juliet. The very Romeo loved Juliet frankly, but had not acquired that sternness which does to some people come with years of discretion. And so Mr. Waller is not the very Romeo. I am glad to see him in a part which depends more on love-making than on fighting and on orating about fighting. I am glad that he has diverged from his line of excellence. It breaks the monotony. Or, rather, it

bends the monotony, which could be broken only if Mr. Waller could forget the line from which he has diverged. This he cannot do. From first to last he is the soldier in love, never the mere lover. When, emerging from the shadow of Capulet's garden, he cries "He jests at scars that never felt a wound," the words take an unusual significance for us: we are sure that the body of Romeo is scarred all over—an heroic document of all the principal Veronese fights in the past fifteen or twenty years. While he stands under the balcony we seem to hear, above Gounod's music (loudly played though that is), a clash of arms round the corner; and Romeo, we are sure, will be in the thick of it as soon as his interview is over. "Away to heaven, respective lenity, and fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now! Now, Tybalt, take the villain back that late thou gav'st me"—never did these words ring out so finely, and never was the villain repaid with so much compound interest. And Mr. Waller's behaviour in this scene differs only in degree, not in kind, from his behaviour throughout the play. His whole performance is "magnifique, mais—c'est la guerre," whilst Romeo, as we know him, was bellicose only in his off-moments. "Oh, sweet Juliet," cries Mr. Waller, "thy beauty hath made me effeminate, and in my temper soften'd valour's steel!" But it hathn't. A man in love does actually assimilate something of the woman's softness; and she, too, catches something of his strength. Juliet at the Imperial Theatre catches nothing of Romeo's strength, and Romeo assimilates nothing of Juliet's softness. Ecstasy, in the strict as well as in the usual sense of that word, befalls all lovers. But Miss Millard and Mr. Waller do not stand outside themselves for one moment. As I have explained, it is just as well that Miss Millard keeps herself in. But Mr. Waller would have nothing to lose by ecstasy, for he does not aim at the effect of boyishness: the prime of life for *him;* and a mature Romeo, lyrically amorous, were nearer to Shakespeare's conception

than a mature Romeo whose love is of so very stern a stuff as is offered by Mr. Waller to Juliet.

I hope that some day our mimes will have learned to distinguish in Shakespeare's plays the passages which are purely poetic or philosophic from those which are also dramatic. At present they seem to think that every line written by Shakespeare was strictly relevant to action or character. Lately I wrote about the disastrous manner in which Miss Maud Milton at the Adelphi recited the exquisite little description of Ophelia's death-place. In "Romeo and Juliet" these dear irrelevancies abound. And the players, of course, instead of dallying with them delicately, go for them as blindly as courageous fox-hunters go for the five-barred gates that challenge them in their wild career. It is part of the dramatic fabric that Romeo should remember an apothecary—a neighbouring apothecary—an apothecary who was poor, and so would be likely to sell poison if he were well paid for it. But it is not part of the dramatic fabric that Romeo should give a long description of the shop, working it up as minutely as ever a Dutch painter worked up an interior. That was simply Shakespeare, going off at a tangent, and forgetting all about Romeo for the nonce. It would be an act of hideous vandalism to "cut" the lines. But better "cut" them altogether than race through them as though they really belonged to the agitated soul of Romeo. That is what Mr. Waller does. And the result is that we don't get the beauty of the passage, and that we do get the full absurdity of their being uttered at this juncture by Romeo. Uttered quietly, in a tone of gentle reminiscence, they would duly enchant us, and the anomaly would not be noticed. Again, when the apothecary brings forth the poison, "There is thy gold" are pertinent words; but when Romeo proceeds to say "worse poison to men's souls, doing more murders in this loathsome world, than these poor compounds that thou may'st not sell," he is merely gratifying

Shakespeare's whim for moralising at large. Any stress laid on the passage is fatal. And oh the stress that is laid on it by Mr. Waller! Dr. Torrey himself never inveighed so wrathfully against the corrupting influence of wealth. I am sure that the more impressionable members of the audience go round to the stage-door and ask to be shown into the "Inquiry Room". I tremble to think what would become of Queen Mab if Mr. Waller were Mercutio. Mr. Esmond is an admirable Mercutio, as merry and debonair as can be; but even in the light hand of Mr. Esmond Queen Mab has a bad time of it. Mercutio should utter the speech with as much conscious pleasure as Shakespeare must have had in the writing of it. Shakespeare did not rattle it off. Mr. Esmond does, as though he were afraid of boring us, or as though Benvolio and those others must have been all the while chafing to foot it in the masque at Capulet's. Surely, Benvolio and those others would have been spell-bound by a worthy utterance of that divine speech. And, surely, so should we be.

AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE

May 6, 1905.

"Holmes and I had just finished a somewhat late breakfast. I pushed the morning paper across to him, remarking 'That rising politician, John Chilcote, seems to have made a great speech in the Commons last evening.'

"Holmes puffed another cloud of tobacco smoke, and took no notice of my remark. I knew by the more than usual rigidness of his face that he was thinking deeply—probably about that somewhat gruesome problem of the driver-less van in Russell Square, which, I knew, was very much on his mind just now. A moment later the servant entered and handed a visiting-card to him. Before he had time to say that he was not at home, a fashionably-attired lady had followed the servant into the room. She was closely veiled, but I could see that her face, which was one of extreme beauty, was deadly pale. Her tightly-clasped hands betokened that she was labouring under some strong emotion.

"Holmes rose from his chair, and, fingering the pasteboard, directed a swift glance at me before he turned to his visitor and said suavely 'Mrs. John Chilcote?' I almost leapt from my chair, so strange did the coincidence appear to me.

"'To what', asked Holmes, 'do I owe the honour of this visit?'

"The lady commenced a confused apology for intruding on us, but Holmes held up his long thin hand, and, with the words 'Pray compose yourself, Madam,' motioned her to a chair.

"'I see', said Holmes, 'that you left your house in a great hurry this morning, and that you did not wish to be observed'.

"The lady started violently. 'How did you . . .'"

Evidently, I am growing old. Sherlock Holmes is dead, and to young readers it may be that he is not even a dear memory. But I was at an impressionable age when he burst upon the world; and so he became a part of my life, and will never, I suppose, be utterly dislodged. I cannot pass through Baker Street, even now, without thinking of him. Long ago I had decided exactly which were the two windows of the sitting-room where Watson spent his wondering hours; and, only the other day, I had a rather heated dispute with a coæval who had also long since "placed" that sitting-room—"placed" it, if you please, on the side of the street opposite to that where it really was (need I say that I mean the right-hand side as one goes towards Regent's Park?). My sentiment for Sherlock Holmes was never one of reverence unalloyed. Indeed, one of the secrets of his hold on me was that he so often amused me. I would have bartered a dozen of his subtlest deductions for that great moment when he said (presumably on the eve of his creator's departure for a lecturing tour in America) "It is always a joy to me to meet an American, for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes." I learned that speech by heart, years ago; and, to this day, I generally try it on any American to whom I am introduced—sometimes with most surprising results. Sir Arthur (then mere Mr.) Conan Doyle's own attitude towards life, and his own extraordinary versions of the familiar things around us—what would Sherlock have been without these assets? Last Monday evening, at the St. James's Theatre, it must have been the account of

John Chilcote's speech in the House of Commons that first turned my thoughts Sherlockwards, and gave me a clue to what the play ought to have been. One of the characters rushed in to describe the triumph to Mrs. Chilcote—to tell how, when her husband resumed his seat, "there was one of those spontaneous outbursts of applause which no etiquette, no decorum, can quell." This picture of the House of Commons as a place in which the members sometimes so far forget themselves as to clap their hands, and are reminded by the Speaker that "a court of law is not a theatre," somehow instantly transported me into the sphere of Sir Arthur's innocent activities. I had been told in the first entr'acte that "John Chilcote M.P." was adapted from a book of the same name, and that this book was very popular. Yet I made no resolve to read this book. The theme of it was surely too ridiculous, too incredible, to be pursued seriously through many pages. Even for a magazine story . . . but ah! in that form Sherlock would have saved it. Why did not the novelist lay the theme at Sir Arthur's feet?

. . . "'Tell me everything', said Holmes—'you understand, *everything*. It is often in those points which seem at first glance inessential, that the key of a seemingly insoluble problem lies hidden.' Then he leant back in his chair, closed his eyes, as his custom was when listening intently, and pressed his finger-tips lightly against each other . . ." Mrs. Chilcote, after a pause, would have told her narrative clearly enough—how her husband was sometimes a brisk and brilliant man of affairs, ardently devoted to herself, but sometimes for days together was languid, irritable, a slave to chloral. Holmes, without opening his eyes, would now and again have interpolated a brief question of which Watson could not for the life of him imagine the relevance. Presently, Holmes would have bowed the lady out, refusing a blank cheque for his well-expressed hopes of giving the lady some good news within twenty-four hours.

"'Well, Watson,' said my friend, 'and what do you make of it?'

"I had to confess that I was entirely in the dark, and that I doubted whether even he, magician though he was, would be able to throw any light on this case.

"'Well,' said Holmes, reaching out for his Stradivarius, and regarding me with a humorous twinkle, 'let me see whether I can throw any light on that sonata in A minor by old Beethoven. We have plenty of time for that other little problem. Some time this afternoon, I propose we should drop in at the House of Parliament. I was able lately to render the Prime Minister a trifling service in that matter of the forged treaty with the Argentine Republic, and I dare say he will give us a pass for the Strangers' Gallery. And, by the way, Watson! Take your pistol with you. You may want it.'"

I cannot guess the exact procedure of the story from this point. I am no match for Sir Arthur in construction of the requisite little steps. But I, or any one, can conceive the final scene in which Sherlock, having revealed to Mrs. Chilcote her husband lying dead from an overdose of chloral, beckons from the adjoining room the brilliant and devoted double, and, joining his and Mrs. Chilcote's hands together, wishes them all possible happiness in the future, and once more refuses a cheque, but, in the interests of morality, conjures them to take the world into their confidence. At the St. James's, Mrs. Chilcote and her husband's double, determining, as the curtain falls, to take the world into their confidence, inspire in us no conviction at all. Sherlock, thou should'st be with them at that hour! Indeed, they have need of thee throughout the play. But I doubt whether even thou could'st save them in dramatic form.

In fact, as I suggested, they should have started in the "Strand Magazine", and stayed there. There we would gladly have accepted the premiss that two men might be so exactly alike in

face and figure and voice that the wife of one would mistake the other for her husband. Process-block illustrations make little strain on our credulity. But when Mr. Alexander and Mr. Thorold appear before us in flesh and blood, with the stage carefully darkened to hide their points of dissimilarity, we are straightway acutely conscious that this is a story of cock-and-bull. Even had it been treated as such by the dramatist, and presented by him as a wild romance or melodrama, we should soon have been wearied by the very absurdity of it. Mr. E. Temple Thurston takes the whole thing quite seriously—presents it as a sombre drama of psychology, relieved by scenes of high comedy. He is at fearful pains to make it realistically credible, making his characters talk about Mr. Adolf Beck, and about a book entitled "Other Men's Shoes" in which two men pass themselves off as each other with complete success. And, throughout, the appeal is not to any base appetite for excitement, but to our power of understanding the inner emotions of actual ladies and gentlemen. This is really a lamentable waste of Mr. Thurston's time, and of ours, and of the talent of Mr. Alexander, and Miss Marion Terry, and the other members of a very good cast. And all in the lifetime of Sir Arthur, who could so easily have been induced yet again to raise Sherlock from the tomb!

"SALOMÉ"

May 13, 1905.

"Salomé" has a strange record. Written in the French language by an Irishman, it would, but for the Censor, have been produced in England by a French actress. Produced in Germany, after many years, and there acclaimed a masterpiece, it has now found a way back into England. The English translation of it was performed last Wednesday at the Bijou Theatre, Bayswater. This was not, however, a wholly auspicious vicissitude for it.

No blame must be laid on the translator, who seems, indeed, to have caught back very skilfully into English the characteristic cadences which Mr. Oscar Wilde had imported, not less skilfully, into French. The mischief, for me, lay in the quality of the acting and of the stage-management; and, deeper, it lay in my conviction that not even the best acting and the best stage-management could make this play so good to see as it is good to read. Of course, I do not mean that "Salomé" has less dramatic than literary fibre. Mr. Wilde was a born dramatist—a born theatrist, too. Not less than in his handling of the quick and complex form of modern comedy, there was mastery in his handling of this slow and simple form of tragedy—a form compounded, seemingly, of Sophocles and Maeterlinck in even proportions. The note of terror in "Salomé" is struck well in the opening lines, and then slowly the play's action advances, step by step, to the foreknown crisis; and it is mainly through this very slowness, this constant air of suspense, that the play yields us the tragic thrill. Kneeling for the fulfilment of Herod's promise to give her anything "even unto the half of his kingdom", the daughter of Herodias says

slowly "I desire that they shall straightway bring me on a silver charger"—"On a silver charger?" echoes Herod, and rallies her for claiming a reward of such little compass, and turns to his courtiers and asks them if she is not a strange girl, and turns to her and tells her that she is beautiful, and so babbles on, all unconscious of what impends. By such tricks of "irony", throughout, the play is prolonged, and the tragedy of its theme is deepened. Certainly, it is a good "stage play" so far as the technique of its author is concerned. But, for all that, it is not a good play for the stage. It is too horrible for definite and corporeal presentment. It should be seen only through the haze of our imagination. The bitter triumph of Salomé's lust for John the Baptist, as she kneels kissing the lips of the severed head, is a thing that we can read of, and vaguely picture to ourselves, with no more than the thrill of horror which tragedy may rightly inflict on us. But when we see the thing—when we have it illustrated to us in sharp detail by a human being—then we suffer something beyond the rightful tragic thrill: we suffer qualms of physical disgust.

The right kind of acting, and the right kind of stage-management, could not save us from such qualms, but could certainly mitigate them. And it was just those kinds that were lacking in the production at the Bijou Theatre. It seems to me, for instance, very obvious that the severed head of John the Baptist ought not to be very obvious to the audience. Salomé, when she receives it from the executioner, ought to remain at the back of the stage, in as dark a shadow as can possibly be thrown on her. In the Bijou Theatre, Salomé brought the head briskly down to the footlights, and in that glare delivered to it all her words and kisses. This was wrong, not merely because it intensified our physical disgust, but also because it destroyed all our illusion.

Even though we looked away, we were aware that this was not the head of the prophet, but simply a thing of painted card-

board—a "property", prepared with much labour and ingenuity. And the fact that we knew it to be no more than this did not make us one whit the less uncomfortable. Indeed, an unpleasant thing that proclaims itself a "fake" is worse than an unpleasant thing that illudes us. Cold cardboard lips kissed passionately by a young lady, on the pretence that they are the cold real lips of a man murdered at her behest, are really a more horrid spectacle for us than they would be if we believed for the moment that in truth Salomé was kissing the lips of John the Baptist . . . "A young lady." The phrase expresses just what was wrong in the acting at the Bijou Theatre. (The dread name Bijou, too, is almost equally expressive.) If Salomé were impersonated by an actress of mysterious charm and force, an actress vibrating with as much sense of beauty as power for horror, then might Salomé make us nearly forget, in very awe of her, our disgust. Were she, as once she was to be, Sarah Bernhardt, all might be almost well. But the actress at the Bijou Theatre was just a young lady—a clever young lady, a conscientious and promising young lady, whose career I shall watch with interest, but who never for one moment last Wednesday began to become Salomé or began to cease to be a young lady. And so, while our æsthetic sense of awe was unstirred, our sense of decorum was very gravely offended. To think that a young English lady in the twentieth century could have been so badly brought up as to behave in so outrageous a manner! We looked severely at her mother. Was she not ashamed? But no; not a day older nor a degree less ladylike than her daughter, Herodias was behaving not a whit less outrageously on her own account. There was only one thing for us to do: to strike them both off our visiting-lists. And to think that in these days of enlightened democracy such a ruler as Herod . . . . Steady, my pen! We did not really think of Herod in relation to our own time. Here was no apparent young English gentleman to bemuse us. Here, indeed, was Herod

himself, incarnate from out the pages of the play—a terrible being, half-dotard, half-child, corrupt with all the corruptions of the world, and yet not without certain dark remnants of intellect, of dignity. I do not remember that I had ever before seen Mr. Robert Farquharson (for he it was); and this is strange, inasmuch as he is evidently an actor of great experience. Imagination, and sense of character, and sense of the beauty of words and cadences, may inhere in the breast of a tiro. But there they inhere: they won't come out. Only through experience can they be expressed. Mr. Farquharson's performance was especially laudable in that he never let his minute expression of Herod's self in all its hideousness interfere with his musical delivery of the elaborate cadences. He performed two tasks in perfect fusion. Passages that might have been merely beautiful he made dramatically hideous, without loss of their beauty. Passages that might have been merely hideous he made beautiful, without loss of their appropriateness. Of course he played all the other people off the stage, figuratively. Literally, they remained there, I regret to say.

The Mermaid Society, this week, has been performing "The Silent Woman". As you may know, this comedy is mainly about an elaborate practical joke. I am not so pedantic as to disapprove of practical jokes, as such, in real life. Even a dull practical joke gives me pleasure, if I play it myself. And even as victim I can enjoy a practical joke, if it be amusing and harmless. And, with that reservation, I can even enjoy hearing about a practical joke in which I figured not at all, if it was played on somebody whom I know well. But I take no earthly pleasure in hearing about a practical joke played on a perfect stranger. Such a joke is amusing only if one can recognise its aptness to the victim, and can intimately imagine its effect on him. For this reason, I am always rather bored by a play of which such a joke is the mainspring. The joke itself may be quite ingenious, quite innocuous, but its victim

would have to be a long-familiar reality to me before I could enter into the fun of it. When Ben Jonson props up a dummy—"Morose, a Gentleman that loves no Noise"—for the sole purpose that a practical joke shall be played on it, I (as owing a duty to my readers) sit the play out; but smile I really cannot; and indeed, as the joke happens to be a barbarous one, even according to the Elizabethan standard, I should be rather ashamed of smiling at it. It might be more tolerable to me if I could suppose that Ben Jonson himself smiled at it. I do feel that Shakespeare got true personal glee out of the pranks played on Malvolio; and that is *some* consolation, at any rate. But Ben Jonson's humour was ever purely intellectual. Ben Jonson had no high spirits. I shall make haste to forget "The Silent Woman". And so, I trust, will our very admirable Mermaid Society.

MME. LE BARGY ET CIE.

June 24, 1905.

Accept an hypothesis. Suppose that an English actress, by no means in the front rank, and having had but slight experience in her art, but happening to be a fluent speaker of the French language, suddenly found herself in Paris, playing the principal part in an English comedy which had been translated into French, and in which the other parts were being played by a first-rate company of Parisian mimes. How would that lady fare? Would she be self-possessed? Would she hold her own among her alien colleagues? Would she perhaps make those alien colleagues look small in the eyes of their compatriots? Would she be commended by all the cognoscenti in Paris, and warmly pressed to the great heart of the French public? Would she . . . Enough! These questions are as brutal as they are foolish. We know full well that within two days that lady would be in England, nursing a broken heart, while the manager who had engaged her would be doing his best to forget her in the lunatic asylum to which his friends had promptly committed him. And yet the hypothesis that I offered is but the ethnological converse of what has happened at the St. James'. Mme. Le Bargy is not a heaven-born genius. Also, she has acted only some half a dozen parts on her native stage. Also, the cast of "The Man of the Moment" is as good-all-round a cast as could be found in London. And, despite all this, Mme. Le Bargy is still in our midst, and Mr. Alexander is at large—has, indeed, enhanced his reputation for acumen. Instead of being played off the stage in her attempt to vie with eminent and experienced mimes in

their own language and on their own ground, Mme. Le Bargy is the very hit of the season. Beside her, the majority of the ladies and gentlemen acting with her come out as clumsy fumblers—as people who don't know their business, and couldn't manage it if they did. The contrast is chastening. But it is certainly interesting. Every one has always admitted that French acting is superior to English acting. Now, for the first time, we have samples of these two things presented simultaneously, and so a valuable opportunity for verifying exactly the difference between them, and for catching the secret of the one's obvious superiority to the other.

The difference between naturalness and artificiality—that is the main difference between French and English acting generally, as exemplified particularly in "The Man of the Moment". Mme. Le Bargy is, above all things, natural. We should not especially notice this quality if she were acting with compatriots; but here it forces itself on us as a stark phenomenon. She walks as any real woman might walk across a drawing-room. She talks as any real woman might talk in a drawing-room. She does not seem to realise that the stage is an odd thing to be on, and that things can only be done in an odd way there. She does not, like our mimes, grasp the fundamental difference between the stage and the home. Purblind lady, she is at home on the stage. When happens something of a nature to arouse the character whom she impersonates—when comes a crisis that in real life would make that character stare, or gasp, or scream, or clench her hands—then Mme. Le Bargy is duly aroused, and ebullient, and unusual. But when it is merely a question of talking trifles, Mme. Le Bargy is a trifler. And when there is nothing at all for her to do, Mme. Le Bargy sits still and does nothing. Not so her coadjutors. They must always be doing something, and doing it strongly, doing it significantly, blackly underlining it for us. If they leave a room, they must leave it as though they were bidding it an eternal

farewell. If they remark that the day is fine, they must imply that there is a deep philosophic meaning buried in this superficially trivial pronouncement. When they come to an emotional crisis, there is not much left over for them to do. They can but keep well up to the level of significance which they have already set for themselves. The result is apt to be bathetic. All things are relative; and if we can never be, like Mme. Le Bargy, insignificant, our significance will seem not quite adequate when there is good cause for it. Of the English mimes in "The Man of the Moment"—of such of them, at any rate, as have anything important to do—Mr. Alexander is the most restrained, the quietest and most natural, the least fussy. But how much of unnecessary significance and strenuousness even he purveys! You remember the end of the third act, for example? Mme. Darlay has confessed her infidelity. Her husband says that he is going to her lover. She implores him to do nothing reckless—asks him what it is that he is going to do. "I am going," replies Darlay, "to tell him that he had better not stay to dinner;" and the curtain falls. Obviously, that is a comedy line—grim comedy, no doubt, but comedy. There is in the play another man whose wife had deceived him, and who had promptly shot her lover. The words have an implied reference to this crime of passion. They mean "Don't be afraid. There will be no fuss. I live in a civilised community, and am going to behave in a perfectly civilised manner. I would rather seem tame to myself, and to you, than be marched off to prison for being a hero." Darlay's words ought, of course, to be spoken in a calm, deliberate, slightly bitter tone. Mr. Alexander thunders them forth into the auditorium. The contrast between them and that peal of thunder provides a more exquisite example of bathos than I had ever dared hope to hear. Of course, it is also an extreme example of Mr. Alexander's tendency to over-emphasis. But there the tendency is. And, as I have said, Mr. Alexander gives way to it less than do the rest of his com-

patriots in the play. Most of them, by the way, have nothing to do with any dramatic crisis in the play's action: they are important only as figures of comedy. But they do not touch the vein of comedy: they are heavy clowns. If Mme. Le Bargy were not in the cast, we should not especially notice their heavy clowning —should take it as we take the air that we breathe. But, having a foil in her light and airy little method, it becomes a grim obsession to us. I do not, of course, pretend that there are no light comedians in England, no heavy clowns in France, any more than I pretend that there are no seemingly natural actors in England, no obviously artificial actors in France. Nevertheless, lightness and naturalness are the exceptions on our stage, and the rule on the French stage; and this general difference is brought sharply home to us by the particular object-lesson at the St. James's. The lightness of the average French comedian, and the heaviness of the average English comedian, are partly explained by the respective paces at which they speak. Mme. Le Bargy has been accused of gabbling her part. The fault is really the fault of her interlocutors on the stage. Certainly, she talks there rather more quickly than talks the average Englishwoman in real life. But does ever an English person of either sex talk with half the deadly deliberation that is used by the mimes at the St. James's? One and all, with baleful eyes on the audience, they seem to be saying "Some of you—have—trains—to catch—after—the performance. . . . Others of you—are going—on—to supper. . . . We—are—determined—that those—suppers—shall be—foregone —and—those trains—missed." Usually, this pace in elocution does not madden me. But with Mme. Le Bargy let loose on the scene as a pace-maker, and enabling me to gauge how few in proportion to the time occupied are the words spoken by English mimes, I am moved to cry out against this idiotic tradition of snailishness. English people in real life do not talk so quickly as French people. But it is not less ridiculous than it is tedious that

they should be represented on the stage always as though they were carefully picking their way through an unknown tongue, or dictating their memoirs under the shadow of death. English people are heavy in the hand, no doubt; but not so heavy as all that. Let no more than their natural weight be imposed on our creaking boards.

MR. CONRAD'S PLAY

July 8, 1905.

I HOPE that "One Day More", which the Stage Society produced with "The New Felicity", is not the only alms that Mr. Conrad will bestow on our needy drama. Mr. Conrad is just the sort of person who ought to be coaxed into writing plays. It is awful to remember that every day throughout the length and breadth of the land, duffers innumerable are, with fervid industry, planning new scenarios, and turning out dialogue by the ream, and getting it type-written and bound in brown paper and despatched to the various managers, whilst, for the most part, the few people who might really help to improve our drama hold themselves aloof from it as surely as respectable Americans hold themselves aloof from politics. That American politics are a hot-bed of corruption is the excuse always pleaded by respectable Americans for their aloofness. That the English theatre is a hot-bed of stupidity and artificiality is the excuse always pleaded by English masters of fiction for *their* aloofness. It is a very poor excuse. Just as the obvious answer to the respectable Americans is that it is their duty to redeem American politics by dashing into them in the full armour of their respectability, so the obvious answer to our masters of fiction is that they cannot expect the English theatre to be other than bad so long as they refuse to help it. When one of these masters does actually condescend to write a play, we ought all to dance around him and pat him enthusiastically on the back, crying "Continue!" I hasten to dance thus around Mr. Conrad. But my gyrations recall painfully to me those of the famous bee who tried to "swarm alone". My colleagues in criticism have,

for the most part, a primitive mistrust of strangers. They do not say "Here is new blood. Let us help it to circulate," but "Here is new blood. Let us throw cold water on it." They do not say of Mr. Conrad "Here is the sort of man that is needed—a man with a wide knowledge of many kinds of life, and a man with acute vision, and with deep human sympathy, and with a passionate imagination—an essentially dramatic imagination, moreover", but "Mr. Conrad has much to learn", or something to that miserable effect. It is the old story of heaving half a brick; and the handiest half a brick is, of course, always to say of a new playwright that he has not mastered the tricks of the stage. Sometimes the criticism is true (though always it is trifling). But in the case of Mr. Conrad it is quite unjustified. Mr. Conrad has not worked on that scale which offers serious difficulties in technical construction. He has not written a full-sized play. He has but turned one of his short stories into a little one-act play. And the short story chosen by him for this purpose happens to be one which any child could dramatise effectively. Indeed, I am not sure that it was not originally conceived in dramatic form. I remember that when I read it in one of Mr. Conrad's books, I thought to myself "Here is a play which has been refused in the usual way by the usual managers; and the author, with a sigh, has now turned it into a short story;" for the action of the story was laid in one scene, and was continuous, from first to last, and was far more "external" than is Mr. Conrad's wont. I had no means of verifying my theory. It is possible that my theory was incorrect. But the fact remains that, as the story was written, practically all that Mr. Conrad had to do, in making a play of it, was to excise all the words that did not appear between inverted commas. The play, as it stands, is a quite straightforward and well-knit play. The characters come on and go off quite naturally. There is no technical blemish whatever. But, even if this play were evidently the work of an amateur, and scored all

over with technical blemishes, how lamentable a lack of critical insight were revealed by a criticism insistent on these blemishes, and impercipient of the originality and the fine humanity and strength underlying them!

The play is a tragedy, set in modern times; and that fact alone is, of course, enough to damn it in the eyes of most critics. A man who detects and depicts anything like a tragedy in modern life is instantly by these critics suspected of "morbidness", and of not thinking that life, generally, is worth living. Of course, the "morbidness" inheres really in these critics themselves, whose taste for life is so slight that they shrink away in horror from any phase of life that is not delicious. The heroine of "One Day More" leads a not at all delicious existence, and consequently these critics scuttle away babbling about defective technique in order to drown their memory of this dreadful girl. Her father is a blind sailor, to the care of whom she has for years devoted her health and strength. He is not at all grateful to her—bullies her, will not give her an instant's rest. She is not so young as she was; and she has enough imagination to repine at the passing of her youth, and the utter vacancy of her life. Except her father, the only person whom she knows is an old and crazy man who lives in the next cottage. He, too, was once a sailor, but had always hated and feared the sea. His son, when he grew to boyhood, ran away to sea, and has never been heard of since. For years and years, the old man has lived only for the return of his son. It is always "to-morrow" that his son will come back to him, and, from day to day he lives on in that certainty. His cottage is packed with an accumulation of things that he buys to make for his son a fine home. And, of course, there must be a wife for his son. This destined wife is the girl next door—"the only sensible girl hereabouts". And to her, during all these years, he has been talking about her future husband. She, of course, does not believe that the son will ever come back. She does not suppose that, if he

did come back, he would want to marry her. Still, so utterly empty her life is that she finds some solace in a hope that she cannot really feel. In the story, as Mr. Conrad wrote it, she and the crazy old man were equally important and elaborately-drawn figures: our interest was divided equally between them. In the play, naturally, she is protagonist, and the crazy old man falls to the background, with the other characters. One day, the son does return. He wants money. The father bids him be off. He wants no beggarly impostors coming to get money out of him. His son is coming back to-morrow—to-morrow. He slams the door of the cottage. Knowing of old his father's obstinacy, the young man finally abandons the attempt to establish his identity. This girl here must help him. Women have always helped him out of difficulties, all the world over. She, in his presence, realises the pitiful absurdity of the hope that she had half held. He laughs aloud when she tells him that his father had wanted him to settle down at home, and laughs still louder at the notion of his ever marrying. He, the wanderer! He, the conqueror of hearts! It is five pounds that he wants. The girl has saved just five pounds. He prevails on her to give them to him. And, in return, he roughly catches her in his arms, and holds her there while he kisses her. At first she struggles, after a while surrenders. Having kissed her enough, he goes off, laughing. The girl stands there dazed. Her name is bawled out from within the cottage. Her father is calling to her. Again he calls, and she goes to him. There the play, like the story, ends. It is a terrible and haunting play, as you may imagine even from this bald description of it. In other words, it is a powerful tragedy. And, therefore, I delight in it. What I want from art is some kind of emotion. It matters not at all to me whether the emotion be in itself one of pleasure or one of pain. In whatever way I be quickened, I am grateful. I pity the critics who can find no æsthetic pleasure in "One Day More". They ought to give up criticism.

I was less moved by the play than I had been by the story. But this disparity is not due to Mr. Conrad's supposed lack of technical skill: the play, as a play, is not less good than was the story, as a story. Nor are the performers to blame. Miss Collier, as the central figure, played admirably in just that minor key which was needed for the particular pathos of the character; and Mr. L'Estrange, as the wanderer, had just the right sort of panache. The reason why the play is inferior to the story is simply that the dramatic form is, generally and essentially, inferior to the literary form. In the one. . . . Hush! Am I not a dramatic critic? And is not my immediate aim to coax Mr. Conrad, for our drama's sake, to further dramaturgy?

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A WORD TO MR. GILLETTE

September 23, 1905.

Last week I laid down the law that "mimes ought never to write plays." I regret that "Clarice" at the Duke of York's Theatre does not move me to except Mr. William Gillette. Rather, it moves me to lay special stress on him; so sharply does it exemplify the vices inherent in all mimes' dramaturgy. There is in it one subsidiary character—an elderly negress, the hero's cook—who seems to me to have an air of reality. But this impression may be due to my ignorance of her kind; and I should not be surprised to hear that she is a stock-figure of the American theatre, with no counterpart on the American soil. My knowledge of that soil is very superficial; but even had I never scraped that soil's surface, I should be in a position to swear that none of the principal characters in "Clarice" bears any relation to reality. They are such stuff as mimes' plays are always made of, all the world over. They are puppets, adjusted to no purpose but that of catching "sympathy" or causing thrills. They are, in technical phrase, "fat" parts, all of them. But, behind the layers of adipose tissue in which they roll so comfortably about the stage, there is never a bone, never a nerve or a vein of blood. This way and that they roll, softly and smoothly, to the music of clapped hands, and under a gentle shower of tears. As a reporter, I acknowledge that the majority of the audience is touched. As a hedonist, I envy these simple souls. As a critic, I proceed to probe the causes of my own indifference.

The hero, Dr. Carrington, leads a quiet life in Southern Virginia. His ward, Clarice Marland, lives with him, acting as secre-

tary, and as illustrator of some scientific book that he is writing. She is, of course, an attractive girl; and he, of course, is an attractive man. Gradually, they have fallen in love with each other. But neither suspects the sentiment of the other. In real life, of course, no two persons could in the circumstances be so obtuse. The mutual sentiment would be as plain as a pike-staff. But then what a chance lost—what "fat" forfeited! Where would be those wistful glances, those long-drawn sighs, that engaging self-depreciation, whereby the hero and heroine are so quickly endeared to you? Where would the first act itself be? Where would be for you that wild, wild thrill of joy when at last, by some happy accident, hero and heroine do at last make the great discovery that their sentiment is reciprocal? The audience knows of old, and imperiously demands, and never will be weary of, that dramatic moment when the hero and heroine gasp, blush, gaze into each other's eyes (unable yet to believe the evidence which those eyes have been offering for months past), and then with cries of joy, or maybe in perfect silence, are gathered to each other's arms. Presently a shadow must fall unbidden—no, the audience bids it fall—across the sunshine. Some awful misunderstanding or other must intervene. Mr. Gillette, ever ready to oblige, supplies a misunderstanding of a rather novel kind. The hero does not, in the usual way, believe the heroine to be false. Instead, he tries to persuade her that he himself is false. His lungs are rather weak, and the doctor who has just been examining them tells him that he is in an advanced state of consumption, and has only a year or so to live. Shall he repeat this to the heroine? No, a thousand times no! He will, and does, tell her that he finds he has made a mistake—doesn't care for her. It would be painful to tell her the truth. But oh, how much more poignantly painful to utter this noble fib, with a cold but not pitiless eye for the girl, and a distraught eye for the audience! Think, too, of the chance for the heroine, abashed, but not

repelled—humbly eager to remain, resuming her previous estate, and to go on with those illustrations for the book! Her attitude creates a new situation. The hero must inflict yet more anguish on himself and her. He must, and does, tell her that she has been not a help but an incubus. Her drawings, he cries, are all wrong. They would ruin the book. She must go. She goes. Later, we see him standing at his window, handkerchief in hand. He is going to cry? No, the hero is one of those strong, silent men who are Mr. Gillette's speciality. The handkerchief is merely to be waved to the heroine in the railway train that will presently pass at no great distance. The train is passing. The hero is ready to wave. But he discerns no answering ensign. The train has passed. The heroine has not waved to him. He supposes she is angry with him. We refuse to believe any such thing of her. Something over which she had no control must have prevented her from waving. The extra sympathy for the hero involves not an instant's loss of sympathy for so indubitable a heroine. The whole thing will be satisfactorily explained later on. Meanwhile, there is another, graver misunderstanding to be cleared up—not for us, but for the hero. We, at the outset, were admitted to a conclave in which the villainous aunt of the heroine did, for her base purposes, urge and persuade the hero's medical adviser, who also loves the heroine, to become a villain and communicate to the sound-lunged hero that sentence of impending doom. A vague suspicion now creeps into the hero's mind. He has just been on the verge of drinking poison before our very eyes. He has raised the bottle almost to his lips. He has thus got nearly all the "fat" that there is to be got by killing himself. Huge slices may yet be carved by him off Life. What if that doctor had deceived him? He will probe the matter. But how? In the actual world, he would hasten to consult another doctor. But no such scrap of lean will satisfy Mr. Gillette. He might, again, as he is a doctor himself, sound

his own lungs. But no; that contingency has already been foreseen by the female villain, and banished by the male villain's reply "Impossible! His instruments are hopelessly out of date." (A few years ago, it seems, medical science could only make dim guesses as to whether a lung were sound.) Our hero will, in the villain's presence, pretend to have taken poison, and thus (he doubts not) elicit the truth (if truth it be) that he is quite well. So he sharpens the carving-knife, and anon many hissing slices of "fat" have fallen to him. The villain confesses, and, cowed and abject, disappears. Enter the heroine (whose failure to wave her handkerchief has already been explained by the fact that she was not in the train). All the lights in the sitting-room go out, leaving the two occupants in a darkness dissipated only by a shaft of nocturnal sunshine which shoots in through the window and reveals their embrace.

It is easy to lay down a law. To make it respected is quite another matter. Mimes will, I fear, continue to write plays, since the practice is one which ministers hardly less to the main public's happiness than to their own. I must find such solace as I can in my prevision of the time when Mr. Gillette will have ceased to write anything but stage-directions. His method in dramaturgy tends ever more and more towards dumb-show. Many men—Carlyle loudly, M. Maeterlinck softly, and so on—have praised Silence. Mr. Gillette practises it. I feel that ere long he will offer to us only that golden thing, sifted and cleansed away from the rubble of dialogue that still clings around it. I feel that his favourite portion of "Clarice" is that in which he, solitary on the stage, takes from his pocket the flower that the heroine has given him, and looks at it for a long time, eloquently, and then puts it back in his pocket, and then walks slowly to the window, and thinks, and takes the flower out of his pocket, and looks at it for a very long time, very eloquently, and then

restores it to his pocket, and then walks very slowly to his writing-table, and seats himself, and thinks very deeply, and then takes the flower out of his pocket, and, after a while, begins to pick it to pieces, petal by petal, after the manner of Marguerite. How long this scene lasted I do not know. I did not time it by my watch. I was wrapt in contemplation of (that which my heart told me was) Mr. Gillette's own innocent pleasure in being able to hold the attention of the audience—his own innocent pride in his own magnetism. Yes, I am sure that the "thinking part", despised by novices, is the ultimate goal of Mr. Gillette's ambition. But why should he stop short at that? With such magnetism as his, need he appear on the stage at all? It would be still more glorious for him, and still less trouble, if he diffused his hypnotic rays from his dressing-room, and never corporeally appeared but to take his calls at the end of each act. Personally I should miss him from the stage. My gladness that he is so magnetic—to other people—is not so keen as my admiration of his great talent (whenever he uses it) for acting. So gifted and so accomplished an actor can hardly be spared—could hardlier, if at all, be spared by me if he appeared in somebody else's plays.

With him, at the Duke of York's, is an admirable company. Nearly always, American companies give one the impression that in America the acting is on a higher level than here—that it is more natural and better disciplined. Much of its charm may be the mere charm of foreignness. But, even so, there remains a wide margin that cannot be ignored. One obvious advantage of the American theatre is its full supply of competent ingénues. In our theatres ingénues do not begin to approach competence till they have long ceased to seem ingenuous. In America, apparently, there is no such retardment. Miss Marie Doro, who plays the part of Clarice, is an altogether exceptional person—so

highly finished is her art, which can have only just begun. But, though I have not seen her match, I have seen many American ingénues who might be mentioned in the same breath with her. In England we never mention our ingénues. It would be brutal.

"THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL"

October 7, 1905.

The story of the Prodigal Son is, of course, one of the best stories in the world, and one of the best themes for an artist to work on. It can be taken from so many points of view, and be interpreted in so many ways; and innumerable variations can be played on it. The most obvious way of treating it is to make it a story of penitence and forgiveness, of dead sea fruit and the inexhaustible kindness of a father's heart. Next to this, the most obvious way is to take as pivot the two brothers—the eternal contrast between good young man and bad young man. Mr. Hankin is, I imagine, temperamentally not a preacher, nor yet a man whose heart and pen throb readily to the music of what we call the great human motives. I can see him approving, and even envying, the perfect Jacobean cadence of "for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found"; but I can see no tears in his eyes while he murmurs to himself the familiar passage. It is natural that he should have chosen to treat the story in the second of the ways I have mentioned. An emotional presentment might be made of the two brothers, with a fervid appeal to sympathy for one or both of them. But, unlike the father, they do not compel emotional presentment. They can be treated comedically, with a measure of sympathy claimed for one or both, or with no sympathy claimed for either. Mr. Hankin claims sympathy for neither. And he vanquishes the difficulty of the father by relegating him to be a mere tool in the hands of his first-born. Mr. Samuel Jackson is a wealthy manufacturer of

cotton; but it is Henry, his first-born, who has made the business brilliantly solid; and it is Henry, throughout, who directs what shall be done with the inconvenient prodigal, Eustace. Eustace has not, apparently, been wasting his substance in riotous living. He simply failed to succeed commercially in Australia, losing the thousand pounds with which he had been sent thither. Since that time, he has been through various vicissitudes of poverty, and, having worked his passage back to England, he goes to his father's house merely for the sake of a meal and a bed. Finding how very prosperous and important a person his father has become in the meantime, he determines to get something more than a fleeting hospitality. His father offers him a berth in the cotton business. But his brother vetoes that notion. And Eustace cordially acquiesces. He has no talent for business. Besides, he doesn't like work. He wants to be a man of leisure. But his father won't have him at home doing nothing, and orders him out of the house. Very well: he will go straight to the nearest workhouse. Father and brother see how fatal it would be to their rather precarious position in the county, and to the chance of Mr. Samuel Jackson's election for the local constituency, if Eustace were thrust on the parish. Thus Eustace is in a position to dictate terms. Mr. Jackson proposes to send him back to Australia with another thousand pounds. Eustace refuses that. He points out that it is just as easy to fail commercially in Australia as to do so in England: he has tried it, and knows. The brother sees the sense of this, and advises the father to accede to Eustace's demand for a yearly allowance of three hundred pounds. The father draws the line at two hundred and fifty, and a cheque, on these terms, for the first quarter. Presenting this to Eustace, he tells him that he may write from time to time to let the family know how he is getting on. "Make it three hundred," says Eustace, "and I won't write." But Mr. Jackson folds his hands behind him. Eustace with a shrug of the shoulders, and

a friendly nod, goes forth into the world. And that is the end of the comedy.

A pure, undiluted comedy, as you may perceive from this slight sketch of it. As there is little in the way of action, and nearly all the fun depends on the adroitness with which one of the characters turns inside out the conventional arguments of the other characters, Mr. Hankin has been much likened by the critics to Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is quite true that Mr. Hankin has come—what young playwright, nowadays, could fail to come?—somewhat under Mr. Shaw's influence. But the likeness of Mr. Hankin's play to what Mr. Shaw would have made of it is a merely technical and superficial likeness. Mr. Hankin does not set out to prove anything, or to probe anything. He merely observes what is going on in the world, and is moved to communicate to us his good-natured amusement. Mr. Shaw, observing a prodigal son, would have knitted his brows, outstretched his index finger, and harangued us to the effect that the prodigal was perfectly right, as a citizen, in his refusal to work under the present conditions of labo(u)r, and that these conditions are irrational, dangerous, and ought to be abolished. And this harangue would have been couched in the form of a delicious comedy. But let us not, merely because Mr. Shaw is ever a dramatist with a purpose, lend grudging ears to the dramatist without one. Mr. Archer is distressed by Mr. Hankin's failure to thrust under our eyes some "general idea, whether moral or social". He gropes industriously around for that idea, and is half-persuaded that Mr. Hankin intended "a scathing satire on our public schools". (What *would* life be without Mr. Archer?) Mr. Hankin "diagnoses" for him "a morbid condition, but gives no hint as to how it may be cured or might have been avoided". In fact, Mr. Hankin is not Mr. Shaw, and stands condemned therefore by Mr. Archer, who, oddly enough, is never tired of throwing cold water on the serious intentions that underlie Mr. Shaw's dramaturgy. Apparently,

Mr. Shaw ought to be Mr. Hankin, and Mr. Hankin ought to be Mr. Shaw. Then Mr. Archer would be happy. But, as Mr. Archer is not a magician, had he not better take people as he finds them, and merely investigate whether this one and that are doing their own best? Mr. Hankin may be trusted to have found what is the line in drama best adapted to his own temperament and talent. And, as his latest comedy of observation is delightfully amusing, and true to life—qualities that Mr. Archer does not deny it to possess—why should we, like Mr. Archer, dismiss those qualities as "rather a meagre outcome for four solid acts"? Heaven forbid that I should discourage Mr. Hankin, or any other playwright, from putting into his plays as much as possible of what Rossetti, in a memorable phrase, called "fundamental brain-work", and of what Mr. Archer (not less hauntingly, I fear) calls "intellectual elbow-grease". But there is no lack of this commodity in "The Return of the Prodigal". And it is Mr. Hankin's own. That is a virtue, from my point of view. I should not rejoice with Mr. Archer at the sight of Mr. Hankin picking the brains of, or (let us say) rubbing elbows with, a person so entirely different from himself as is Mr. Shaw.

It seems to me absurd to blame Mr. Hankin for not telling us why Eustace is deficient in will-power—why, though he is far more clever than his highly successful brother, he continues to be an abject failure. Eustace himself does not know the reason. He supposes that he was born so. And he makes no effort to fight against the unlucky accident. He was born to loaf, if he should have the chance; and, so soon as he sees the chance, he uses all such energy as he has to grasp it firmly. He is the philosophic loafer—a type that exists in real life; and the type has been admirably drawn for us by Mr. Hankin. I have but one fault to find. Eustace declares that of course he, like every one else, "would *like* to be a highly respected, prosperous member of the community". I do not think that the true Eustace—the *widely*

typical Prodigal Son—would have felt that. He would have had an innate aversion from respectability and prosperity. These things would have bored him, except perhaps for a while. I remember reading a sonnet, written by a not yet famous poet, describing the gloom that must have settled on the soul of the Prodigal Son after the first flood of sentiment was forgotten, and the novelty of comfort had lost its edge. How slowly and smugly the days passed in that admirable household, shut off from all the chances and changes that alone could make life worth living! Wistfully, the Prodigal looked back on his vagabondage, yearning as much for its miseries as for its pleasures—"Oh for the husks of freedom that were sweet!" I wish Mr. Hankin had adumbrated for us this side of the Prodigal's story. For a moment, indeed, there is a glimpse of it. "My life," says Eustace, "hasn't been successful. It hasn't even been honourable. But," he adds with a ruminating smile, "it was devilish interesting." That, however, is the only glimpse. For the rest, Eustace would evidently be well content to settle down permanently under his father's "roof", if his father would consent to the arrangement. So subtly right does the quoted sonnet seem to me that I wish Mr. Hankin would reconstruct his whole play in accord to it. But this would necessitate for Eustace a loving father, who would implore his son not to leave him; and the curtain would have to fall on a broken heart. It would, in fact, necessitate the sort of thing that is not at all in Mr. Hankin's line. And I must not let Mr. Archer catch me tripping just where I have caught him.

HENRY IRVING

October 21, 1905.

One mourns not merely a great actor, who had been a great manager. Irving was so romantically remarkable a figure in modern life, having such a hold on one's imagination (partly because he left so much to it), that his death is like the loss of a legend. As an actor, and as a manager, he had his faults; and these faults were obvious. But as a personality he was flawless —armed at all points in an impenetrable and darkly-gleaming armour of his own design. "The Knight from Nowhere" was the title of a little book of Pre-Raphaelite poems that I once read. I always thought of Irving as the Knight from Nowhere.

That he, throughout his memorable tenancy of the Lyceum Theatre, did nothing to encourage the better sort of modern playwright, is a fact for which not he himself should be blamed. It was the fault of the Lyceum Theatre. In that vast and yawning gulf the better sort of modern drama would (for that it consists in the realistic handling of a few characters in ordinary modern life) have been drowned and lost utterly. On a huge stage, facing a huge auditorium, there must be plenty of crowds, bustle, uproar. Drama that gives no scope for these things must be performed in reasonably small places. A more plausible grievance against Irving, as manager, is that in quest of bustling romances or melodramas he seemed generally to alight on hack-work. I think there can be no doubt that he was lacking in literary sense, and was content with any play that gave him scope for a great and central display of his genius in acting. He did not, of course, invent the "star" system. But he carried it as far as it could be

carried. And the further he carried it, the greater his success. From an artistic standpoint, I admit that this system is indefensible. But theatres, alas! have box-offices; and the public cares far more, alack! for a favourite actor than for dramatic art. Justice, then, blames rather the public than the favourite actor.

It was as a producer of Shakespeare that Irving was great in management. He was the first man to give Shakespeare a setting contrived with archaic and æsthetic care—a setting that should match the pleasure of the eye with the pleasure of the ear. That was a noble conception. Many people object, quite honestly, that the pleasure of the ear is diminished by that of the eye—that spectacle is a foe to poetry. Of course, spectacle may be overdone. Irving may sometimes have overdone it; but he always overdid it beautifully. And there was this further excuse for him: he could not, even had the stage been as bare as a desert, have given us the true music and magic of Shakespeare's verse. He could not declaim. That was one of the defects in his art. His voice could not be attuned to the glories of rhythmic cadence. It was a strange, suggestive voice that admirably attuned itself to the subtleties of Irving's conception of whatever part he was playing. It was Irving's subtle conception, always, that we went to see. Here, again, Irving was an innovator. I gather that the actors of his day had been simple, rough-and-ready, orotund fellows who plunged into this or that play, very much as the water-horse plunges through the reeds. They were magnificent, but they had not pretensions to intellect. Irving had these pretensions, and he never failed to justify them. One missed the music of the verse, but was always arrested, stimulated, by the meanings that he made the verse yield to him. These subtle and sometimes profound meanings were not always Shakespeare's own. Now and again, the verse seemed to yield them to Irving only after an intense effort, and with a rather bad grace. All the parts that Irving played were exacting parts, but he had his revenge some-

times, exacting even more from them. This was another defect in his art: he could not impersonate. His voice, face, figure, port, were not transformable. But so fine was the personality to which they belonged that none cried shame when this or that part had to submit to be crushed by it. Intransformable, he was—multiradiant, though. He had, in acting, a keen sense of humour—of sardonic, grotesque, fantastic humour. He had an incomparable power for eeriness—for stirring a dim sense of mystery; and not less masterly was he in evoking a sharp sense of horror. His dignity was magnificent in purely philosophic or priestly gentleness, or in the gaunt aloofness of philosopher or king. He could be benign with a tinge of malevolence, and arrogant with an undercurrent of sweetness. As philosopher or king, poet or prelate, he was matchless. One felt that if Charles the Martyr, Dante, Wolsey, were not precisely as he was, so much the worse for Wolsey, Dante, Charles the Martyr. On the other hand, less august types, such as men of action and men of passion, were outside his range, and suffered badly when he dragged them within it. Macbeth had a philosophic side, which enabled Macbeth to come fairly well out of the ordeal. But Romeo's suicide in the vault of Capulet could only be regarded as a merciful release. Unfortunately, though I saw and can remember Irving as Romeo, I never saw him as Hamlet. This is one of the regrets of my life. I can imagine the gentleness (with a faint strain of cruelty), the aloofness, the grace and force of intellect, in virtue of which that performance must have been a very masterpiece of interpretation. I can imagine, too, the mystery with which Irving must have involved, rightly, the figure of Hamlet, making it loom through the mist mightily, as a world-type, not as a mere individual—making it loom as it loomed in the soul of Shakespeare himself—not merely causing it to strut agreeably, littly, as in the average production. Above all, I can imagine how much of sheer beauty this interpretation must have had. Though,

as I have said, Irving could not do justice to the sound of blank-verse, his prime appeal was always to the sense of beauty. It was not, I admit, to a sense of obvious beauty. It was to a sense of strange, delicate, almost mystical and unearthly beauty. To those who possessed not, nor could acquire, this sense, Irving appeared always in a rather ridiculous light. "Why does he walk like this? Why does he talk like that?" But, for any one equipped to appreciate him, his gait and his utterance were not less dear than his face—were part of a harmony that was as fine as it was strange. And, though the cruder members of the audience could not fall under the spell of this harmony, they were never irreverent until they reached their homes. Never once at the Lyceum did I hear a titter. Irving's presence dominated even those who could not be enchanted by it. His magnetism was intense, and unceasing. What exactly magnetism is, I do not know. It may be an exhalation of the soul, or it may be a purely physical thing—an effusion of certain rays which will one day be discovered, and named after their discoverer—Professor Jenkinson, perhaps: the Jenkinson Rays. I only know that Irving possessed this gift of magnetism in a supreme degree. And I conjecture that to it, rather than to the quality of his genius, which was a thing to be really appreciated only by the few, was due the unparalleled sway that he had over the many.

In private life he was not less magnetic than on the stage. The obituarists seem hardly to do justice to the intensely interesting personality of Irving in private life. He has been depicted by them merely as a benevolent gentleman who was always doing this or that obscure person a good turn. Certainly, Irving was benevolent, and all sorts of people profited by his generosity. But these two facts are poor substitutes for the impression that Irving made on those who were brought into contact with him. He was always courteous and gracious, and everybody was fascinated by him; but I think there were few who did not also fear him.

Always in the company of his friends and acquaintances—doubtless, not in that of his most intimate friends—there was an air of sardonic reserve behind his cordiality. He seemed always to be watching, and watching from a slight altitude. As when on the first or last night of a play, he made his speech before the curtain, and concluded by calling himself the public's "respectful—devoted—loving—servant", with special emphasis on the word "servant", he seemed always so like to some mighty cardinal stooping to wash the feet of pilgrims at the altar-steps, so, when in private life people had the honour of meeting Irving, his exquisite manner of welcome stirred fear as well as love in their hearts. Irving, I think, wished to be feared as well as loved. He was "a good fellow"; but he was also a man of genius, who had achieved pre-eminence in his art, and, thereby, eminence in the national life; and, naturally, he was not going to let the "good fellow" in him rob him of the respect that was his due. Also, I think, the process of making himself feared appealed to something elfish in his nature. Remember, he was a comedian, as well as a tragedian. Tragic acting on the stage is, necessarily, an assumption; but comedy comes out of the actor's own soul. Surely, to be ever "grand seigneur", to be ever pontifically gracious in what he said and in his manner of saying it, and to watch the effect that he made, was all wine to the comedic soul of Irving. He enjoyed the dignity of his position, but enjoyed even more, I conjecture, the fun of it. I formed the theory, once and for all, one morning in the year 1895—the morning of the day appointed for various gentlemen to be knighted at Windsor Castle. I was crossing the road, opposite the Marble Arch, when a brougham passed me. It contained Irving, evidently on his way to Paddington. Irving, in his most prelatical mood, had always a touch—a trace here and there—of the old Bohemian. But as I caught sight of him on this occasion—a great occasion, naturally, in his career; though to me it had seemed rather a bathos, this

superimposition of a smug Hanoverian knighthood on the Knight from Nowhere—he was the old Bohemian, and nothing else. His hat was tilted at more than its usual angle, and his long cigar seemed longer than ever; and on his face was a look of such ruminant, sly fun as I have never seen equalled. I had but a moment's glimpse of him; but that was enough to show me the soul of a comedian revelling in the part he was about to play—of a comedic philosopher revelling in a foolish world. I was sure that when he alighted on the platform of Paddington his bearing would be more than ever grave and stately, with even the usual touch of Bohemianism obliterated now in honour of the honour that was to befall him.

Apart from his genuine kindness, and his grace and magnetism, it was this sense that he was always playing a part—that he preserved always, for almost every one, a certain barrier of mystery—that made Irving so fascinating a figure. That day, when I saw him on his way to Windsor, and tried to imagine just what impression he would make on Queen Victoria, I found myself thinking of the impression made there by Disraeli; and I fancied that the two impressions might be rather similar. Both men were courtiers, yet incongruous in a court. And both had a certain dandyism—the arrangement of their hair and the fashion of their clothes carefully thought out in reference to their appearance and their temperament. And both, it seemed to me, had something of dandyism in the wider, philosophic sense of the word—where men whose whole life was ordered with a certain ceremonial, as courtly functions are ordered. "Brodribb", certainly, was an English name; but surely Irving has some strong strain of foreign blood: neither his appearance nor the quality of his genius was that of an Englishman. Possibly, like Disraeli, he had Spanish blood. Anyhow, his was an exotic mind, like Disraeli's, dominating its drab environment partly by its strength and partly by its strangeness. Both men were romantic to the

core, ever conceiving large and grandiose ideas, which they executed with a fond eye to pageantry. And, above all, both men preserved in the glare of fame that quality of mystery which is not essential to genius, but which is the safest insurance against oblivion. It has been truly said that Irving would have been eminent in any walk of life. Had Disraeli the Younger drifted from literature to the foot-lights, and had Henry Brodribb strayed from the school-room into politics, I daresay that neither our political nor our theatrical history would be very different from what it is—except in the matter of dates.

"THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE"

November 11, 1905.

Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker have made no more signal discovery than Mr. Barker's new play; and I hasten to offer my congratulations. I have often inveighed against the plays written by mimes, and have even asserted that no mime could possibly write a good play. Mr. Barker is an exceptional person, in whose presence I bow, corrected. On him, somehow, the blight of the theatre has not fallen. He has continued to keep himself less interested in the theatre than in life. He is not, and may he never become, "one o' the boys". May he ever continue to be their antithesis, letting his mind range actively over the actual world, not wallow in that one little weed-covered pond, the theatre, which reflects nothing. May his very bright intellect never grow dim. I may have to suggest anon that he is too purely intellectual to be perfect. For the present, though, let there be nothing but praise.

It is always the most obvious and most promising themes that our playwrights most ostentatiously neglect. One of these themes is the fradulent solicitor. Mr. Barker's mere choice of this theme is laudable; but far more so is his treatment of it. Having chosen his type, he has shown it to us from within, laying bare all its intricacies. Mr. Voysey, of Voysey and Son, is no mere arbitrary figure of a scoundrel. A scoundrel he is, but much besides; and we are supposed to understand the reason and the exact quality of his scoundrelism, and to gauge the whole of his character "all round". In a sense, scoundrelism has been thrust on him. When he inherited his father's business, he found that it had been based,

all the time, on fraud. He threw himself into the task of setting the business on an honest basis, without doing violence to his filial instinct by letting the world know about his father. In time, he achieved his task; but, in doing so, he had acquired a taste for the ingenious manipulation of funds. He had found that he had a genius for finance. Consequently, he soon became bored by the humdrum of a well-regulated little business. Moreover, he had begotten a large family, to which he was devoted; and, except by manipulating his clients' funds, he could not "provide handsomely" for it. So he proceeded to manipulate, and continued to manipulate, ministering thus both to his paternal feelings and to his financial genius. Scruples of conscience troubled him not at all in his strenuous life. "Let us realise," he says, "that religion is one thing, home-life another, and business another; and that each of these great things in life is to be practised separately. Then we shall be able to practise them with all our strength, and to get the full benefit that is in them." I quote from memory, and these are not, doubtless, the actual words. But I have preserved the spirit of the passage well enough to give you a grasp of Mr. Voysey's philosophy, and of the lines along which Mr. Voysey's character has developed. The one cloud on his horizon is that none of his available sons seems fitted to carry on the business when he dies. Edward, for example, is a prig, and has steeped himself in various ethical systems. Still, it is on Edward that he must depend. Edward is taken into partnership, and the first scene of the play (for it is only in the play's course, gradually, that one learns what I have told you about Mr. Voysey) is concerned with Edward's horror at the revelations that have been made to him, and with the inward conflict in him as to whether he shall desert his father, whom he still loves, or shall become an accessory to, and possibly a scapegoat for, his father's frauds. The conflict is admirably conducted by Mr. Barker, who leaves it, however, undecided till the end

of the second act. This act is occupied mainly by showing us the family "interior". And Mr. Barker excels not less in incisive sketches of character than in elaborate portrayals. The Voyseys are a very large family, and a very ordinary family. Yet every one of them is made to stand out distinctly and amusingly. Their very colourlessness becomes lurid through the accuracy with which it is observed by Mr. Barker, and through the sharp and subtle irony with which he shows it to us. In the second act we see the Voyseys in their daily round—in all the decent pettiness and dulness of their ordinary selves. In the third act we see them tested by a tragic crisis. Their father has died a death for which the audience was "prepared" by a queerly felicitous little touch at the end of the third act. After the funeral, Edward, who did finally decide to take up the partnership in his father's business, has to break to the mourning family assembled the news of its founder's nefariousness. A hundred thousand pounds has been left by Mr. Voysey; but three hundred thousand would hardly cover the liabilities of the firm to its clients. Edward points out that it is clearly the duty of the various children, married and unmarried, to surrender their legacies. This notion, somehow, does not appeal to the Voyseys; and their attempts to reconcile their distaste for it with the rectitude on which they pride themselves, and their bewildered doubts as to how to reconcile their virtuous indignation against their father with a decorous attitude towards the deceased whom they have been so sincerely mourning, and all the other elements of doubt that are battling in their souls and making them dimly ridiculous even to themselves, suffice to furnish what I am tempted to regard as the finest scene of grim, ironic comedy in modern English drama. Both in conception and in execution, the scene is the work of a master. It is admirably played, too, by the many mimes who figure in it. People often ask, quite innocently, with a genuine desire for information, why the acting at the Court Theatre

seems so infinitely better than in so many other theatres where the same mimes are to be seen. I should have thought that the two reasons were obvious. One is that the mimes at the Court are very carefully stage-managed, every one of them being kept in such relation to his fellows as is demanded by the relation in which the various parts stand to one another—no one mime getting more, or less, of a chance than the playwright has intended him to have. The other reason is that at the Court Theatre are produced only plays written by clever persons who have a sense of character, and who are thus enabled to create characters which are human, and which, therefore, repay the trouble that the mimes take in playing them.

After this conclave scene, which is, I repeat, masterly, comes a scene to remind us that the master is still, to some extent, a pupil —a member of Mr. Shaw's academy for young gentlemen. Edward Voysey is tempted to let his father's firm go brankrupt, and so extricate himself from the unpleasant life in which he has become involved. No retrospective blame could be laid on him. Technically, as a member of the firm, he would be responsible. But he could show that since his entry into the firm there had been no fresh irregularities, and that his influence had been all on the side of the clients. On the other hand, if he continued the business, a smash would certainly come sooner or later, and he would be sent to penal servitude. Why should he court imprisonment for doing a thing from which he revolted? There was one highly chivalrous reason. He might, if the smash did not come too soon, gradually rescue the money of the humbler investors. He determines that to this offchance he will sacrifice himself. I have nothing to urge against this determination in itself. But it is made at the instance of a Miss Alice Maitland, with whom Edward is in love; and Miss Alice Maitland won't do at all. There may, conceivably, be young ladies like her in real life. But the point is that all the young ladies in Mr. Shaw's plays are exactly like her; and,

however appropriate they may sometimes be to their own setting, a replica of them is just what is not needed, and what is injurious, here. Wanted, an ordinary human person, who happens to be in love with Edward Voysey. Miss Maitland has the customary Shavian allowance of coquetry; but she shows no sign that she is in love with Edward, or could possibly be in love with any one except herself. She wants to marry, of course; but whether or not she will marry Edward depends entirely on whether or not he shall startle her by contriving to live up to her own theories of general morality. That she might sympathise with him in his ordeal is the very last thing that would occur to her. She simply waits to see how he will acquit himself. Time passes, and Edward now has managed to rescue some of the money aforesaid, and is in daily risk of exposure and imprisonment. He really has become worthy of her perfect self, and she sets her seal of approval by offering to marry him. "But what," asks he, "if I am sent to prison?" "Then," she says, meditatively, "I shall have to be very careful." He asks her why. "Because," she replies, "my pride will be so great." I doubt if even a Shavian woman (granted her existence) in real life would, at such a juncture, merely utter this little, dry, academic, all-in-the-air paradox about her own prospective emotions. Certainly, any ordinary woman would shrink with horror from the prospect of her lover being sent to prison, and being parted from her. Master Barker, at his desk in the Shavian academy, has shrunk with not less horror from the notion of admitting an ordinary woman into his play. The British drama has been given over almost exclusively to the portrayal of sentimental emotions, and to false portrayal of them; so that the reaction of a gifted young dramatist against sentimental emotions in any form is quite natral. It is well that we should have a dramatic portrayal of moral enthusiasm. But moral enthusiasm can be distorted quite as easily as the sentimental emotions. And it has been distorted even so by Mr.

Barker. A heroine with nothing in her soul but abstract ethics is just as foolish a contrivance as a heroine of the average concentional play. For Mr. Barker's special purpose, Miss Maitland ought to have been a woman in whom moral passion was combined with a very strong passion of love for Edward Voysey. Then she would have supplied in herself an interesting conflict that would have added much to the interest of Voysey's own. As it is, she is as undramatic as she is (despite the charm of Miss Mabel Hackney's acting) insufferable; and I cannot imagine a greater tribute to the play than the fact that she doesn't wreck it. If she had not been brought in at all, I should not have lamented the "lack of feminine interest". The play would have been quite all right without her. But, as she was brought in, I have to call Mr. Barker's attention to her as a warning not to be afraid of sentiment, and ashamed of it, merely because it isn't brain-power. Sentiment is a not uncommon thing in real life. It is a very common and potent thing, and worthy material for even the cleverest of dramatists.

ACTRESSES AND AGES

November 18, 1905.

One sometimes sees, not often, an elderly actress playing the part of a girl. The sight is distressing, and mars any illusion that the play may have power to create. But, at any rate, one has the solace of knowing that the actress is doing her best, and is failing only because she is unevenly matched in the duel with Nature. One has not this solace when one sees, as one so often does see, a young actress playing the part of an old or middle-aged woman. It is as easy to simulate eld as it is difficult to simulate youth. Crow's-feet and hollows, though they cannot be painted out, can be painted in. Infirmity of movement, or mature deliberation of movement, can be easily assumed by youth, though youth's agility can only be mocked by the efforts of eld. And youth's inimitable voice can easily be toned to notes other than its own. Yet, simple though these tricks are, young actresses are never seen playing them. Cast for elderly parts, they will go so far as to powder their hair, à la Marquise. Thus far, and no further. Their faces must not forfeit the bloom and linelessness of youth. And the result is a pretty picture of eighteenth-century young womanhood, and needs but a "mouche" on chin and cheek to consummate the illusion. A very living picture, too—living with all the blithe intensity of youth, moving with kittenish grace and freedom, and sparkling, and mincing, and coquetting, ever so prettily, and melodious with notes of laughter yet more silvery than the aforesaid coiffure. It seems rather churlish to cavil at a thing so pleasant in itself. But one has to judge it in relation to what it was intended to be by the author of the play

which it adorns, and in relation to the exact dramatic impression which it ought to make on us. And by such standards one is bound to deem it amiss.

I noted two strong instances of it lately, in a very successful play which, in deference to the two ladies who supplied the instances, I will not particularise. One of these two had to impersonate an old maid, whose heart of gold was obscured by a very sharp tongue. In the course of the play, she was more than once referred to as "that old harridan". Yet, facially, she was the most winning of most juvenile ladies from the court of Le Roi Soleil. In voice, too, and in movement, and in everything but the rude things she had to say, she was signally, and unremittingly, seductive. Thus these rude things were utterly queered in their "value". Said by an elderly woman, they would have seemed a pardonable form of eccentricity, as intended by the author. Said by a very young and pretty woman, they were quite unpardonable insults, for which this very young and pretty woman would anywhere have been excluded from decent society. Nor was this the sole mischief. The whole reason for the old maid's presence in the play was that she was to act as chaperon to a young man and woman who might otherwise have been compromised in the eyes of an audience ever jealous for the chastity of heroes and heroines. But, as she appeared to be practically a coæval of the heroine, her chaperonage lost its obvious force; and only by a hard effort of the imagination, made with shut eyes, could the audience take her at her proper value. The other instance was supplied by a lady who impersonated a married woman with a grown-up daughter. For some time after the curtain rose, I was under the impression that the mother and daughter were sisters; and when I did, at length, grasp the relationship, I had to exercise the greatest care not to let it slip from me. Of course, one has seen sometimes in real life a mother and daughter who, in the distance, and at a cursory glance,

might pass for sisters. But such misunderstandings can be contrived only through great pains taken by the mother. And the mother in this play was a simple and admirable creature, with no jealousy at all of her daughter's youth. Thus even a momentary misunderstanding would have been a pity. How much more a pity, a misunderstanding that had to be guarded against throughout the whole course of the play!

Such instances could, if I ranged over other plays, be multiplied indefinitely. These two suffice to the plaint that I am making at large. I move a resolution that the refusal of young actresses to add, in any circumstances, one week to their ages, is deleterious to the interests of dramatic art, and ought to be abolished. Young actors do not err thus. They err, rather, in the opposite direction. Cast a young actor for the part of a man of sixty, and the chances are that he will insist on playing it with all the extremest symptoms of senile decay. His face will not be visible through a network of wrinkles; his hands will tremble like aspen-leaves; his voice will quaver in the topmost treble. All this he will regard as "a good bit of character", and will be wholly delighted. Why has our young friend no counterpart among mimes of the other sex? It might be urged that women have less power of impersonation than men have. That is true. They can hardly escape from themselves. But they wouldn't if they could, when it were a question of young actresses impersonating old women. All women have a far more intense abhorrence from the prospect of eld than any men have. To assume publicly the aspect and manner of eld would be for them a hideous reminder of their future in private life—a reminder which their comparatively shallow devotion to art would never suffice to make them incur. Of course, women who are married and have several children do not regard the prospect of eld with very great horror (though even they regard it with greater horror than does the average young bachelor). But these women are not on the stage. At any

rate, none of them is among the actresses who are young. The young actresses, one and all, for reasons of nature, are passionately averse from the simulation of eld. But there are professional reasons, too, for the aversion—reasons of trade. Every young actress wants to be a great success, and to earn a great salary. Unless she happens to be also a great genius, her salary will cease to be great after her first youth. With great genius, she will be able to linger on, dictating her own wishes, and playing young parts after she has ceased to be young, at the rate of fifty or more guineas a week. Without that rare gift of genius, she will have no chance of playing parts that do not befit her years. She will have to be content with humdrum middle-aged parts, for which the remuneration is (however unjustly) small; and (according to the present policy of managers) she will not be engaged often even for these. Thus, the young actress beholds before her a brief career. She will have to make hay while the sun shines, and, incidentally, to keep the sun shining as long as possible, and to make it appear to shine even after it has set. So soon as she is definitely regarded as middle-aged, the game is, to all intents, up. It is likely that she will, meanwhile, do anything which might serve to make the public forget her youthfulness, or might give a definite impression that she is no longer young? No, it is too much to expect of her that she shall play middle-aged parts artistically. It is too much to expect of even the most imperious stage-manager that he shall succeed in compelling her to play such parts in such a way. On the other hand, it is not too much to expect of the managers themselves that they shall cease to offer her such parts. The middle-aged actress is not rare. It is to her that such parts should be offered. Her endeavour will be to play them youthfully. But, even so, she will not be able to mar the needed illusion so completely as it is marred now.

MR. SHAW'S POSITION

December 9, 1905.

It must amuse him, whenever he surveys it; and I hope he will some day write a comedy around it. It bristles with side-lights on so many things—on human character in general, and on the English character in particular, and on the particular difficulties that genius encounters in England, and on the right manner of surmounting them.

For years Mr. Shaw was writing plays, some of which, by hook or crook, in holes and corners, were produced. They were witnessed, and loudly applauded, by such ladies and gentlemen as were in or around the Fabian Society. Not that these people took their socialist seriously as a playwright. They applauded his work in just the spirit in which, had he started a racing-stable, they would have backed his horses. He was taken with some measure of seriousness by such of the professional critics as were his personal friends, and were not hide-bound by theatrical tradition. Here, they perceived, was something new in the theatre; and, liking to be in advance of the time, they blew their trumpets in their friend's honour. The rest of the professional critics merely sniffed or cursed, according to their manners. The public took no notice at all. Time passed. In Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and elsewhere, Mr. Shaw was now a popular success. Perhaps in the hope that England had caught an echo of this exotic enthusiasm, Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker ventured to produce "John Bull's Other Island". England had not caught that echo. There was only the usual little succès d'estime. But, not long after its production, the play was witnessed by a great lady, who advised

an august person to witness it; and this august person persuaded a person yet more august to witness it. It had been withdrawn, meanwhile; so there was "a command performance". All the great ladies, and all the great gentlemen, were present; also, several paragraphists. That evening Mr. Shaw became a fashionable craze; and within a few days all London knew it. The Savoy restaurant is much frequented by fashion, and by paragraphy; and its revenues are drawn mainly from the many unfashionable people who go to feast their eyes on the people who are fashionable beyond dispute. No large restaurant can live by the aristocracy alone. Nor can even a small theatre. Mr. Shaw "pays" now because now the English middle class pays to see that which is seen and approved by the English upper class, and (more especially) to see the English upper class. Whether either of these classes really rejoices in Mr. Shaw, as yet, is a point on which I am doubtful. I went to see "Man and Superman" a few nights ago. The whole audience was frequently rocking with laughter, but mostly at the wrong moments. (I admit that Mr. Shaw's thoughts are often so profound, and his wit is always so swift, that to appreciate his plays rightly and fully at a first hearing is rather an achievement.) But it was obvious that the whole audience was very happy indeed. It was obvious that Mr. Shaw is an enormous success. And in the round-about way by which success has come to him is cast a delicious light on that quality for which England is specially notable among the nations.

His success is not gratifying to the critics. To those critics who are incapable of exercising their brains, and who have always resented Mr. Shaw vehemently, it is of course, galling to find themselves suddenly at odds with public opinion—the opinion which they accustomed to "voice". Having slated "John Bull", and slated "Man and Superman", they must have been in a fearful dilemma about the play produced at the Court Theatre last week, "Major Barbara". Perhaps this, too, was going to "catch

on". Would it not be safer to climb down, and write moderate eulogies? I suspect it was stupidity as much as pride that diverted them from this ignominious course. They really could not make head or tail of the play. They were sure that this time Shaw really had come a cropper—had really delivered himself into their hands. "A success, are you? Pet of the public, are you? We'll see about that. *We*'ll pet-of-the-public you. *We*'ll" etc., etc. The old cries—"no dramatist", "laughing at his audience", and the like—were not sufficient, this time. "Brute" and "blasphemer" were added. In the second act of the play, Mr. Shaw has tried to show some of the difficulties with which the Salvation Army has to cope. A ruffian comes to one of the shelters in quest of a woman who has been rescued from living with him. A Salvation "lass" bars his way, and refuses to yield. He strikes her in the face. The incident is not dragged in. It is necessary to the purpose of the whole scene. Nor has any one ventured to suggest that it is an exaggeration of real life. Nor is the incident enacted realistically on the stage of the Court Theatre. At the first performance, anyhow, the actor impersonating the ruffian aimed a noticeably gentle blow in the air, at a noticeably great distance from the face of the actress impersonating the lass. I happen to be particularly squeamish in the matter of physical violence on the stage. I have winced at the smothering of Desdemona, for example, when it has been done with anything like realism. The mere symbolism at the Court Theatre gave me not the faintest qualm—not, I mean, the faintest physical qualm: æsthetically, of course, I was touched, as Mr. Shaw had a right to touch me. And it seems to me that the critics who profess to have been disgusted and outraged must have been very hard up for a fair means of attack. Equally unfair, for that it may carry conviction to the minds of people who have not seen the play, is the imputation of blasphemy. Mr. Shaw is held up to execration because he has put into the mouth of Major Barbara

certain poignant words of Our Lord. To many people, doubtless, it is a screamingly funny joke that a female should have a military prefix. Also, there is no doubt that Mr. Shaw's play abounds in verbal wit, and in humorous situations. But the purport of the play is serious; and the character of Major Barbara is one of the two great factors in it. With keenest insight and sense of spiritual beauty, Mr. Shaw reveals to us in her the typical religious fanatic of her kind. Sense of spiritual beauty is not one of the qualities hitherto suspected in Mr. Shaw; but here it certainly is; and I defy even the coarsest mind not to perceive it. (To respect it is another matter.) When Major Barbara comes to the great spiritual crisis of her life, and when she believes that all the things she had trusted in have fallen away from her, what were more natural than that she should utter the words of agony that are most familiar to her? That any sane creature in the audience could have been offended by that utterance, I refuse to believe. It was as inoffensive as it was dramatically right. And the critics who have turned up the whites of their eyes, and have doubtless prejudiced against the play many worthy people who have not, like them, had the opportunity of seeing it, must submit to one of two verdicts—insanity or hypocrisy. I have no doubt that of these two qualities they will prefer to confess the latter. It is the more typically British.

In that delicate comedy, "Mr. Shaw's Position", the parts played by these critics seem rather crude. There is a subtler fun in the parts played by some of the superior critics—the critics who were eager to lend helping hands to Mr. Shaw in the time of his obscurity. So long as he was "only *so* high", and could be comfortably patted on the head, they made a pet of him. Now that he strides gigantic, they are less friendly. They seem even anxious to trip him up. Perhaps they do not believe in the genuineness of his growth, and suspect some trick of stilts. That would be quite a natural scepticism. A great man cannot be

appreciated fully by his intimate contemporaries. Nor can his great success be ever quite palatable to them, however actively they may have striven to win it for him. To fight for a prince who has to be hiding in an oak-tree is a gallant and pleasant adventure; but when one sees the poor creature enthroned, with a crown on his head and a sceptre in his hand, one's sentiments are apt to cool. And thus the whilom champions of Mr. Shaw's virtues are now preoccupied mainly with Mr. Shaw's defects. The old torches are still waved, but perfunctorily; and the main energy is devoted to throwing cold water. Whereas the virtues of Mr. Shaw used to be extolled with reservations for the defects, now the defects are condemned with reservations for the virtues. Mr. Shaw, it is insisted, cannot draw life: he can only distort it. He has no knowledge of human nature: he is but a theorist. All his characters are but so many incarnations of himself. Above all, he cannot write plays. He has no dramatic instinct, no theatrical technique. And these objections are emphatically reiterated (often with much brilliancy and ingenuity) by the superior critics, while all the time the fact is staring them in the face that Mr. Shaw has created in "Major Barbara" two characters—Barbara and her father—who live with an intense vitality; a crowd of minor characters that are accurately observed (though some are purposely exaggerated) from life; and one act —the second—which is as cunning and closely-knit a piece of craftsmanship as any conventional playwright could achieve, and a cumulative appeal to emotions which no other living playwright has touched. With all these facts staring them in the face, they still maintain that Mr. Shaw is not a playwright.

That theory might have held water in the days before Mr. Shaw's plays were acted. Indeed, I was in the habit of propounding it myself. I well remember that when the two volumes of "Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant" were published, and the or-

dinary dramatic criticisms in this Review were still signed G. B. S., I wrote here a special article in which I pointed out that the plays, delightful to the reader, would be quite impossible on the stage. This simply proved that I had not enough theatrical imagination to see the potentialities of a play through reading it in print. When, later, I saw performances of "Mrs. Warren's Profession", "The Devil's Disciple", and "You Never Can Tell", I found, to my great surprise, that they gained much more than they lost by being seen and not read. Still, the old superstition lingered in my brain. I had not learnt my lesson. When "Man and Superman" was published, I called it "Mr. Shaw's Dialogues", and said that (even without the philosophic scene in hell) it would be quite unsuited to any stage. When I saw it performed, I determined that I would not be caught tripping again. I found that as a piece of theatrical construction it was perfect. As in "John Bull's Other Island", so in "Major Barbara" (excepting the aforesaid second act), there is none of that tight construction which was in the previous plays. There is little story, little action. Everything depends on the interplay of various types of character and of thought. But to order this process in such a way that it shall not be tedious requires a very great amount of technical skill. During the third act of "Major Barbara", I admit, I found my attention wandering. But this aberration was not due to any loosening of Mr. Shaw's grip on his material. It was due simply to the fact that my emotions had been stirred so much in the previous act that my cerebral machine was not in proper working order. Mr. Shaw ought to have foreseen that effect. In not having done so, he is guilty of a technical error. But to deny that he is a dramatist merely because he chooses, for the most part, to get drama out of contrasted types of character and thought, without action, and without appeal to the emotions, seems to me both unjust and absurd. His

technique is peculiar because his purpose is peculiar. But it is not the less technique.

There! I have climbed down. Gracefully enough to escape being ridiculous? I should like mine to be a "sympathetic" part in "Mr. Shaw's Position."

IDOLUM AULARUM

January 13, 1906.

In the suburban music-halls one finds plenty of talent, rough but undeniable. The entertainments there are cheerier than in the "syndicate" halls. They have more élan, and less pretension. But their audience is what most interests me. In suburban music-halls the public lets itself go. You behold it naked and unashamed. In a metropolitan hall, to which it has come from various distances, it is not quite itself. But to a suburban hall nearly every one has come, as it were, from round the corner. All are neighbours, and all feel themselves at home, and behave with perfect naturalness. Listening to their volleys of laughter or of applause, marking their silences and their positive expressions of disapproval, and correlating all these with the entertainment, you have an unique chance of gauging their true character and tastes—for detecting just what they really think and feel and are. You may be disappointed in them. But you are bound to be very much interested.

In one of these palaces of truth, a few nights ago, I was especially interested in what I learned about the public as hero-worshipper. Two performers, a man and a woman, were giving what the programme called "A Pot-pourri Entertainment": they sang, performed conjuring tricks, and did various other things. As the final item, the man announced that he would impersonate some famous characters. Setting his back to the audience, he busied himself before a mirror, and presently turned round, wearing a tunic of khaki, a brown wig parted in the middle, and a moustache of the same colour. Thus disguised, he stared

fixedly at us. Whether any one ever looked less like Lord Kitchener is a point which I will not dare to decide. The audience, having been told whom to expect, clapped its hands. A wild salvo of cheers, anon, greeted a somewhat weak-faced and untidy Mr. Chamberlain. There was some cheering for Lord Roberts, with a very considerable admixture of booing. "I am now," said our Proteus, "going to represent General Buller—the Man who Did his Best." I assure you I thought that the roof of the hall would come off. While Proteus was putting the final touches, and while the audience was still roaring itself hoarse, the female performer, who had vanished, reappeared unobtrusively, and, as General Buller wheeled round saluting to the audience, she struck a meditative attitude beside him. She was wearing a grey wig, a white veil topped with a small diamond crown, and a broad blue riband across her breast. The orchestra played the National Anthem. I have considerately prepared you, sensitive reader, for the grotesque and pitiful truth that took me unawares. The female performer represented the late Queen Victoria. The din continued. It was not louder than it had been when General Buller's name was first mentioned. No din, indeed, could have been louder than that. But I wished to detect in it some notes of disapproval. There was not one. The late Queen was superfluous as an incentive to enthusiasm for General Buller; but it seemed to the audience a quite natural thing, a thing quite right and seemly, that she should take her stand beside him and share his triumph. They loved and revered the memory of her. She was no intruder in this heroic company. It was a graceful and pleasing thought to have summoned her hither from her resting-place. It showed a sense of the fitness of things. And thus, with Queen Victoria resting her chin on her hand and gazing dreamily at the audience, in juxtaposition to General Buller at the salute, the curtain fell, amidst deafening and delirious enthusiasm.

I might dilate on the hopelessness of submitting any delicate or beautiful work in drama to a public so coarse-fibred that it welcomes, instead of instantly hissing off the stage, the ghastly exhibition that I have described. But I will concern myself merely with the public's taste in heroes, as here exemplified. Not that I am going to be iconoclastic. I have no wish to dash an image from its pedestal: I am merely wondering how it came there. Far be it from me to rake up the details of a not very interesting war. Further still be it from me to deny that General Buller is a brave man, and a good-hearted man. No one, I suppose, will deny that Lord Roberts also is a brave man, and a good-hearted man. Why, then, should Lord Roberts stand so much less high in the esteem of our emotional public? It is natural that General Buller should be a pre-eminent hero in Devonshire; for Devonshire is his home; and county-feeling is in Devonians almost as strong an instinct as family-feeling or patriotism. But one may be sure that the audiences of our suburban music-halls are not recruited mainly, or even in great part, from Devonshire. Why, then, their passionate idolatry of General Buller? His name may have something to do with it, as being fraught with popular associations—John Bull, bulldog tenacity, and so forth. But Lord Roberts, in the reception of whose semblance, the other night, booing was mingled with mild cheering, bears a name not less auspicious—a name that conjures up "gags" that have passed into the language, and "breaks" that never will be forgotten. The cause of the difference evidently lies deeper than in nomenclature. We find it, I think, in the fact that General Buller did not conquer the Boers, and that Lord Roberts (to a certain extent) did. Just as Lord Roberts made some mistakes, so did General Buller do some things well. But, roughly, the one man was a success, the other a failure. And nothing appeals more surely to the average Englishman than failure on a large scale. He judges not by intentions, but by results. A

successful man may have been animated by intentions quite as pure and noble as those of the man who has failed. But the fact remains that he has succeeded. He has achieved that which the average man would have bungled; and thus he can inspire no brotherly love. He may not be a genius—may not have just those qualities which the average Englishman most sharply abominates; but he must take the consequences of seeming to be a genius—must be judged by results. Failure is the surest conciliator of mediocrity. It makes, also, the surest appeal to sentimentality. The Englishman, because he is gruff and stolid in manner, is supposed by foreigners not to be sentimental; whereas, in reality, there is nothing he enjoys more than shedding tears. Give him the right to call you "Poor old fellow!" and there is nothing he will not do for you. Make yourself the cause of a lump in his throat, and he is your debtor for life. Of course, an unknown man cannot win popularity throughout England by the simple expedient of making a public failure. A man must previously have attained a certain eminence. He must fall from a height, so that the average men are flattered by finding themselves level with him, and so that they have a solid excuse for exercising the voluptuous emotion of pity. In other countries than England this business of falling from a height does not bring popularity; for, though mediocrity, all the world over, envies eminence, England is the one country which is sentimental to the core. Germans are, in their ponderous way, sentimental about youth and beauty, about wine, woman, and song. But they never let sentiment interfere with their keenness for the national welfare. A German who fails in some national task is regarded as a public enemy. Even more is this so among the Latin races, which have no sentiment about anything under the sun, and always hound down the maker of a national failure as swiftly and pitilessly as animals destroy an ailing member of their species. Of course, it must be very nice for eminent public servants in England to

know that they can instantly become idols by making of this or that task such a muddle that their official career will be closed. And it seems very nice of the English people to be so complaisant. But I think it a pity that, with all our chivalry, we have no gratitude left over for the men who have succeeded. It seems to me not right that the semblance of Lord Roberts should be booed, while that of "the Man who Did his Best" is wildly acclaimed. Lord Roberts himself did his best. It ought not to be accounted a sin in him that his best was nearly good enough. In the midst of the war, when sentimentality was totally eclipsed by panic, we were very grateful to Lord Roberts. Now that the panic has passed, sentimentality ought not to concentrate all its beams on General Buller.

It is useless, though, to reason with sentimentality. One can but study it. And a suburban music-hall is certainly the best school in which to study the special forms of it that inhere in the English public.

"DOROTHY O' THE" BOWERY

April 21, 1906.

It is very natural that the Americans, having no history worth mentioning, should be so much keener than we on the "antiquities" that abound in Europe. It is very natural that they, having no art worth mentioning, should eagerly covet for their own country the objects of art that we take as a matter of course and hardly notice. I have never been inclined to join in the outcry that is raised whenever some famous work of art (of whose existence so few of us had hitherto been conscious) is in danger of being spirited away across the Atlantic. Why, my dear "D. S. M.", should we play the dog in the manger? We are surfeited with beauty. Why grudge this or that morsel of beauty to our starving "cousins"? Especially, too, when these poor relations are prepared to pay so handsomely for the transfer! At this moment, many loyal subjects of the King are secretly aggrieved that the royal collection of Whistler's etchings has been thrown on the market and bought by an American. Yet the objects of art in Windsor Castle vastly outnumber the motor cars. Why, pray, should a few scratchings on copper be hoarded? We, as a business-like nation, ought rather to rejoice that we are ruled over by one who knows the right moment at which to sell. If there were a sudden "boom" in the late Herr Winterhalter's portraits, or in the seascapes of the Chevalier de Martino, why should not even these august works be allowed to flutter back to the native lands of their respective makers? Italy, I admit, is rich already in art-treasures, and might be accounted greedy in retrieving the Chevalier. But Germany is still poor: why should she not grasp

again the master-hand of her fugitive son? Poorer yet is America. It seems only right that she should have the chance of gathering to her wide and wistful bosom, at last, the works of him who basely deserted her in order that he might achieve them.

It is not for America's sake only that I am glad whenever some famous work of art, "this side up with care", crosses the Atlantic. I am glad, also, for the sake of that work of art. Its beauty will be intensified, out there. I never visit any one of our national collections without wishing it could be all disbanded. I should like to give it all away, broadcast, in "lots" of two or three—a "lot" apiece to every respectable householder who applied. Set in separate shrines, the uglier the shrine the better—these treasures would radiate their full significance. Massed together, they do but mar one another. You cannot rightly see them. There are too many of them. They fatigue you. Now, in a somewhat modified sense, my objection to these public galleries may be applied to England itself. So many are the beautiful old houses throughout England that they, too, mar one another. They are not packed together, of course, like objects in a collection. Yet, however wide the parks that enclose them, these houses are too near together, too many, for perfect admiration. Take, for example, Haddon Hall—the place taken by Messrs. Paul Kester and Charles Major, American dramatists, as the scene of "Dorothy o' the Hall". It is a lovely place in itself; but there are in England so many other places not less lovely. We cannot concentrate our minds on it. If we suddenly saw it (say) on the outskirts of Chicago, how much lovelier would it have grown for us! I wish that not pictures and statues only, but whole mansions could be carried in triumph over the water. I should wave them a hearty send-off from the docks. On the other hand, I should be the first to protest if some American millionaire, entering into possession of Haddon Hall, began to tamper with it where it stands. If starred and striped sun-blinds were

affixed to the crumbling casements, and spread eagles of brass were ranged along the coping, and brazen statues of honest senators along the terrace, I should be very angry indeed. Of course, no American millionaire would tamper thus. No, *Sir!* He would guard the character of the place more jealously than could any Englishman. His reverence for it would be in proportion to its remoteness from his experience. But, though in matters of actual architecture, Americans are the least vandalistic of all races, they —some of them, let us say—are a trifle barbarous in matters of literature. I dare say that Messrs. Paul Kester and Charles Major, like so many of their compatriots, have visited Haddon Hall. I dare say that they went there thinking pretty thoughts about Dorothy Vernon, and stood there imbued with an exactly right sense of Dorothy's romance. I see them lingering by the postern gate, silent, with a tender light in their eyes, with a true vision of Dorothy in their souls. The silence is broken: *"Say, Paul,* [or *Charley,*] *we must* USE *this!"* I conjecture that they mapped out the scenario, with native briskness, on their way back to the railway station. And what a scenario! Perhaps they felt inwardly ashamed of it—did their fell work reluctantly. But the chances are that they saw no harm in it. A man may have the most exquisite sensibilities, the keenest vision; and yet, when he has to express himself through an art-form, become coarse and stupid. No dramatist, moreover, ever yet achieved popularity by deliberately "playing down to" the public. The public instantly finds out that trick, and will none of it. Mr. Kester, I know, is a very popular dramatist in America. So, I dare say, is Mr. Major. The chances are that they both did their best for "Dorothy o' the Hall". And what a best! Messrs. Kester and Major may dispute the accuracy of the parallel that I draw by inference between their work and the desecration of Haddon Hall by an American millionaire. I offer them a less imaginative parallel. Suppose I went to America, and visited some "show-place" corre-

sponding (*mutatis mutandis*) with Haddon Hall. Suppose, for example, I visited, with an intense interest in its associations, Tammany Hall. What would Messrs. Kester and Major think of me if I proceeded to write, for the American public, a play called "Croker o' the Hall", showing the famous Boss as an exquisite figure of romance, and involving him in some romantically exquisite adventure? They would say to me "This won't do, Sir, for the American public." I wish I could complete my otherwise exact parallel by assuring Messrs. Kester and Major that the British public won't stand "Dorothy o' the Hall". But alas! such sentiment as the British public may have for Miss Vernon, and such power as it may have to discriminate between her and a Bowery "tough", are as nothing against its love of tawdry melodrama. The audience at the New Theatre, last Wednesday, seemed to be almost delirious with enjoyment. I am sure that no Bowery "tough" could be quite so crude a creature as the Dorothy of Messrs. Kester and Major. No matter. The authors may be pardoned a slight exaggeration from the model. It was necessary to bring the figure into consonance with the peculiar quality of their historical invention.

Miss Julia Neilson and Mr. Fred Terry are very popular. I wish they were so popular that they could force the public to accept them even in good plays. Two or three years ago they did make a great effort for art's sake. But "Sword and Song" had to be withdrawn very soon after its production. One cannot reasonably blame them for persisting now in the one kind of thing that pays. Certainly they cannot be accused of selecting a play for no other reason than that the chief part happened to suit Miss Neilson's style of acting. The part of Dorothy is mainly comedic; and Miss Neilson has no comedy in her: comedy is somewhere far from her, a mysterious, hard god, that must be frantically invoked, and laboriously appeased. A comedian might soften the dreadful outlines drawn by Messrs. Kester and Major.

Skimming lightly through (or rather over) her part, she might, in some degree, dulcify it. Miss Neilson, trying to wring the full value out of every line, and having no natural comedy of her own to cover that value up, impressed me with her strength of character, but did not artistically please me. I welcomed the romantic passages (though romance, as purveyed by Messrs. Kester and Major, is a hardly less fearsome article than humour); for then Miss Neilson quieted down, and was able to give us something of herself. Mr. Fred Terry, who plays Sir John Manners, is a born romantic actor. True, he does not, I think, ever sound any depth of emotion. When Queen Elizabeth (who dances a duet with Miss Vernon) decrees that Sir John shall be parted from his inamorata for a year, Mr. Terry murmurs "A year!" several times, with a beatific gaze, and in a voice thrilled with lyric rapture, as though Sir John had at last attained his heart's desire. It is not the strictly right effect; but it is somehow a more romantic one than any other actor on our stage could compass. Romantic acting is a matter not of truth, but of atmosphere; and this atmosphere Mr. Terry diffuses unceasingly, without effort. Could any one but he, hiding behind a bower of roses, thrust his face through the flowers, in sight of the audience, without seeming ridiculous? Mr. Terry thrusts his face thus, and stays thus for several seconds; and yet manages to remain, as he would say, "mahnly". It is a remarkable achievement.

"THE FASCINATING MR. VANDERVELDT"

May 5, 1906.

Mr. Sutro has two manners, for two moods, in dramaturgy. Sometimes life is real, life is earnest to him, and must be strenuously preached about. At other times life appears to him as a trifle in itself, to which he owes no duty except a graceful attitude. It is in this mood that I admire him the more. His sermons do not greatly stir me: they seem too much informed by the desire to say what the congregation expects. But Mr. Sutro's grace in writing, like his humour, is a thing that comes directly from his own inner self. He is, since Mr. Oscar Wilde, the most "literary" of our playwrights—has, more than any other, a fine sense of words, and a delicate ear for cadences. In calling him "literary", I do not mean that he makes his characters talk "like books". In realistic plays of modern life, it is, of course, essential that the characters shall talk with apparent naturalness. Suppose one of the characters in a play is a costermonger. Obviously, it would be wrong that he should talk with classical propriety. Here the playwright can show his sense of "style" only by selecting such locutions as are at once most characteristic of costermongers at large and most pertinent to the matter in hand. For good or ill, England has no academy of letters; and, indirectly one result—certainy an ill result—of this refusal is that the people in every stratum of society talk hardly better than costermongers. They have not, of course, specifically the same slang; but their slang is not less ugly than that which prevails in the Mile End Road; nor is their vocabulary of decent English words less limited; nor is their knowledge of grammar more sound; nor is their sense

of rhythm better developed. Like most of our playwrights, Mr. Sutro casts his lines among the leisured classes. To make them talk with real naturalness, he would have to jettison his literary classicism as surely as he would in reproducing the exact manner of a costermonger. But only apparent naturalness is needed. And because the "barbarians" have, as a rule, pretty manners, and pleasing appearances, it is no strain on us to invest them with other graces also. Much of Mr. Sutro's new play consists of a contest of wit between the hero and a Lady Clarice Howland. Neither he nor she uses any phrase or construction that would be pedantic in a talker in real life. But I have rarely heard in real life any one use the English language so tastefully. What matter? The words do not sound unnatural. We merely feel that we are listening to a lady and gentleman who happen to be accomplished talkers. And in listening to this dialogue we have as much pleasure as had Mr. Sutro in composing it.

The actual scheme of the play is according to the formula that Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has often used. Lady Clarice is the rather frivolous but quite virtuous woman; and Mr. Vanderveldt is the *homme à bonnes fortunes* by whom she is compromised; and "The Cow and Calf" is the name of the compromising wayside inn. Mr. Sutro conducts the story with much skill; and, if we are not much excited by it, the fault is not his, but its. We know it so well—know so exactly how it must end. Lady Clarice must be reinstated in the world's favour, and the exact means of her re-instatement can evoke but a technical interest. Mr. Sutro gives a new twist to the formula by making his couple arrive at the inn by motor, instead of by rail; and also by making the lady adopt, in the last act, a defiant attitude towards her doubters. The details of the motor-drive are quite plausible and, so far as I can judge, accurate. But the lady's defiant attitude seems to me not in keeping with her character and with the circumstances of the case. Having disappeared in the after-

noon with a gentleman of lax principles and not having returned before the following morning, she would surely not resent the anxiety of her friends and relations to hear some sort of explanation. A strong-minded, Ibsenesque heroine, with a contempt for social conventions, might, perhaps, draw herself up to her full height, and snub her interrogators, as does Lady Clarice. But is it natural for Lady Clarice to do so? She is a perfectly conventional woman, who has undoubtedly compromised herself; and she would, in the natural course of things, welcome the opportunities she has of explaining things satisfactorily. "If women would only put more trust in one another, they would be more likely to gain the respect of men" is in itself an admirable apothegm. Sir Austin Feverel might have composed it, and preserved it in the Pilgrim's scrip. But it wouldn't have leapt, just then, to the lips of Lady Clarice.

It is a pity for Miss Violet Vanbrugh that Lady Cicely has no other lines which need to be delivered with an air of serious and intense conviction. For Miss Vanbrugh excells in effects of serious intensity I think she has improved in effects of comedy during the past few years. But I doubt whether she will ever improve so far that Fate will be forced to acknowledge itself wrong in not having let her be born a comedian. Fate will, I think, always prefer to see her in those romantic tragedies and melodramas to which she was predestined. Fate must be pleased to notice that Mr. Bourchier, born a comedian, is ceasing to overlay his birthright with crude buffooneries. It is two or three years since I have seen him act; and I was delighted by a very real improvement. Evidently Mr. Bourchier now foreswears those devices by which he used, so industriously, to raise a laugh at any cost. I hope I have had something to do with his conversion. So far as his talent, apart from his personality, is concerned, he could not play the part of Mr. Vanderveldt better. I notice among the critics a disposition to suggest that he does not make

Mr. Vanderveldt live up to the epithet bestowed by Mr. Sutro. But what man shall lay down laws as to what exactly constitutes fascination for women? The critics, probably, would say that Mr. Vanderveldt ought to have a more caressing voice, curlier hair, a lither figure, a more tender regard in the eyes. It is true that, on the stage, Don Juan usually has these trappings. But it is equally true that Don Juan, off the stage, very often hasn't them, and that the man who has them is very often a complete failure. Nor is there, off the stage, any such thing as a Don Juan (in the accepted sense). No man, I mean, ever was irresistible to every woman. Different women are attracted by different kinds of men. Ardent temperaments fascinate one woman; cold temperaments another. Strength of character or weakness of character, bravery or brain-power, a loud voice or a gentle voice, coarseness or refinement, tallness or shortness—all these and other mutually exclusive opposites appeal to different types of woman. It is true enough that Mr. Vanderveldt, as impersonated by Mr. Bourchier, is not "fascinating" according to the conventions of the theatre. But to say that he would not have fascinated Lady Clarice, and various other women, is to adventure where we have no possible foothold.

IN THE PIT

May 12, 1906.

It was with much diffidence that I wrote, last week, about Mr. Sutro's new play. Usually I am well up in my subject—have a vivid impression to analyse. But of "The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt" I had only a very faint and hazy notion. Had I not happened to read a description of the play before I visited it, I could hardly have gathered any notion at all. Only through previous knowledge of what the characters were, and what they were doing, was I enabled to form enough of an opinion to write an article. A very uninteresting article I thought it when I read it last Saturday morning. I did not blame myself, though. No man can write well about a thing which he has had no chance of mastering at first hand.

How, you ask, had this chance been withheld from me? Well, three or four years ago I began to get on Mr. Arthur Bourchier's nerves. He no longer wanted my hints on the art of acting, and so, as a hint on the art of criticism, he ceased to send me tickets for his theatre. Since then, I have not intruded at the Garrick Theatre, except once or twice when Mr. Bourchier has produced something that I was really anxious to see. I wanted to see Mr. Sutro's play; so to the Garrick again I went; but, on my arrival, found myself suffering under the disability common to lads who are going to carve out a future in this great metropolis: I had only half a crown in my pocket. To find my way to the pit entrance, thrust my coin through a pigeon-hole, clutch at a brass ticket, and descend a narrow flight of stone stairs, was for me the work of a moment. I had no misgivings. Though I had never

happened to see a play from the pit, and my heart was leaping with the sense of adventure, I knew no fear. How often, passing this or that theatre, hours before the performance, had I seen a serried row of men and women doggedly waiting outside the door that led to the pit! Was it likely that they would spend their valuable time thus if there were not a great treat in store for them? The Pit! There was a certain traditional magic in the sound. There was some secret of joy that I had often wished to elucidate. "I enclose my card, and am, Sir, your obedient servant, An Old Pittite." How often in the newspapers had I read letters with this conclusion! And such letters—so oracular, permeated with so notable a pride! It had often been borne in on me that there must be in the pit something—some mystic grace—that enables a man to judge more surely, to take himself more seriously, and to spend a happier evening, than elsewhere. . . . It was with a glad heart that I bounded down the stone steps.

Gradually my eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness, and I groped my way to a vacant space that I discerned on the backmost bench. Not until I was seated did I realise that the play had begun. Yes, there, at a distance of what seemed to be fifty dark miles or so, was a patch of yellowish light; and therein certain tiny figures were moving. They were twittering, too, these figures. I listened intently. I strained my ears, I strained my eyes. And, since both my sight and my hearing are excellent, and since, as I have told you, I had read a detailed notice of the play, I was enabled to get some sort of vague illusion—the sort of illusion that one gets from a marionette show. I felt with my hand the back of the bench in front of me, hoping to find there a steel cylinder with a slot. Perhaps, however, it is just as well that a man in the pit cannot obtain a telescope in the way he can obtain a pair of opera-glasses in the stalls. If the mimes were so clarified and magnified for him that he could realise the changing expressions of their faces, then the faintness of their voices

would seem to him all the stranger—would be all the more detrimental to his illusion of reality. So intensely, at the Garrick, did I have to listen, in order not to miss what the mimes were saying, that I thought there was perhaps something peculiar in the acoustics of the Garrick pit. I have consulted several frequenters of pits, and they tell me that the Garrick pit is a rather good one. Certainly Mr. Bourchier, Miss Vanbrugh, Mr. Aubrey Smith and other persons engaged in "The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt" are not bad elocutionists. And yet, the other day, with all my attention, I was constantly failing to overhear them, and having to use my experience of plays in general as a means of guessing at the drift. I saw an infinitesimal miniature of Miss Vanbrugh cross the stage and lay its hands in the hands of another lady who was just visible to the naked eye. And I heard this sound: "Want—pew." From the context of the play, and from the deportment of the two actresses, I was able to guess that Miss Vanbrugh had just said, "I want to help you." Probably my guess was right. But still, it is a bore to be kept guessing; and I was kept guessing in this way, from time to time, throughout the performance. The only members of the cast who never failed to make their words easily audible to me were Miss Henrietta Watson and Mr. Charles Goodhart. To the latter I owed another debt of gratitude, inasmuch as I could see him smile. Mr. Bourchier's smile, also, I could see, quite distinctly. For the rest, no facial expression was anywhere discernible. Had I been sitting in the stalls, I should doubtless have accused Mr. Bourchier of "clowning"—of smiling more widely than he ought to in a not farcical part. You may remember that last week I complimented him on having acquired the restraint needed for comedy. But he must not preen himself overmuch on that compliment. What seems like restraint to the man in the pit may seem like violent over-acting to the man in the stalls. And what seems like restraint to the man in the stalls may be a mere blank,

a vacuum, to the man in the pit. Everything depends on the point of view.

The relativity of things occupied my mind throughout the entr'actes of the play. Here was I, who am accustomed to occupy a comfortable stall without paying anything for it, and to see the mimes life-sized, and to hear them quite distinctly. And yet I seldom enjoy a play—nearly always have to console myself with the reflection that I am going to be paid by this Review for my presence. Here, on the other hand, were people who are accustomed to pay for uncomfortable seats, and who are not going to receive any payment for sitting on them and straining their eyes and ears for sight and sound of distant marionettes. And these people, obviously, are not rebellious. They really are glad to be there. Strange! For the constant pittite, no doubt, the strain of eyes and ears is less than for me. His eyes and ears must have been somewhat habituated by time. Moreover, if he has never happened to sit in a stall, he will not be conscious how much of the play and of the performance he is missing. Like Plato's cavemen, who knew naught but the shadows cast against the inner wall, and who would have been sorely puzzled by the realities, the constant pittite, doubtless, accepts as real creatures the tiny puppets vouchsafed to him. He accepts them, I mean, as the nearest approach that can in a playhouse be made to reality. I imagine that as seen from the gallery, and even from the "upper circle", the puppets must be still less lifelike than as seen from the pit. And, since these three parts of the theatre hold the majority of the audience, I begin to understand why there is so little demand for dramatic truth to life. To me, sitting in the stalls, the persons of a play look very like human beings, and I want them to be allowed to behave accordingly. I am in a position to take them seriously. But to the majority of the audience they are little more than performing fleas. If I went to criticise a troupe of performing fleas, I should not write and attack their

trainer because the performance had not closely tallied with my experience of human beings. I should not go to be instructed. I should go to be amused. It is in this spirit, necessarily, that the majority of people go to the play. They know that they cannot see anything that will remind them of actual life. What matter, then, how great be the degree of remoteness from reality? The marvel to me, since my visit to the pit of the Garrick, is not that the public cares so little for dramatic truth, but that it can sometimes tolerate a play which is not either the wildest melodrama or the wildest farce. Where low tones and fine shades are practically invisible, one would expect an exclusive insistence on splodges of garish colour. . . . I shall in future be less hard on the public than has been my wont.

A NOTE ON THE BALLET

May 19, 1906.

Ballet, as an art-form, inspires me with less of delight than of affectionate interest. It was at its perihelion in the time of our fathers. And for all men the time of their fathers is the most delicious time of all—just near enough to be intelligible, just far enough to seem impossible. I am glad I never saw Grisi, glad I never saw Taglioni. Their names would not make such music for me, had the vision been vouchsafed. Nor would those pale-tinted portraits of them, still to be seen in out-of-the-way places—Taglioni floating through a glade; Grisi perching on the boards with the tip of one foot—touch so agreeably in my bosom the chords of pathos. I am glad the tradition of the ballet has not been lost. I like to see the "haute école" not quite disestablished, after all these years, by skirt-dancers and cake-walkers. But the æsthete in me rejoices less than the sentimentalist. As a representation of life, ballet fails for me. I am a writer, and thus a lover of words, and where no words are is a void for me. At least, there is a void where words might have been but are not. In a painting I do not feel the need of words, for they are excluded by the nature of the art. But they are not excluded thus from ballet. Their exclusion, the substitution of mere gesture, is quite arbitrary. There is no essential reason why ballet should not, like opera, have words. It gains nothing by the sacrifice, and (for me) loses nearly all. There is (so far as I, in a theatre, am concerned) no reality in a wordless representation of life. And, however fantastic be a representation of life, it ought to awaken a sense of reality—a fan-

tastic sense of reality. Ballet not merely gives me no illusion: it conveys no meaning to me. Here, I admit, its failure is due partly to a defect in myself. A man ought to be able to master the meanings of formalised gesture. When a ballerina lays the palms of her hands against her left cheek, and then, snatching them away, regards them with an air of mild astonishment, and then, swaying slightly backwards, touches her forehead with her finger-tips, and then suddenly extends both arms above her head, I ought of course to be privy to her innermost meaning. I ought to have a thorough grasp of her exact state of mind. Friends have often explained to me, with careful demonstrations, the significance of the various gestures that are used in ballet; and these gestures are not very many; and I have more than once committed them to memory, hoping that, though I could never be illuded, I might at least be not bemused. But, after all this trouble, the next ballet that I have seen has teased and puzzled me as unkindly as ever. Is it that gestures were given to the ballerina to conceal her thoughts? Or is it merely that the quickness of the hand deceives the eye? Unable to catch for one fleeting instant the drift of the lady's meaning, I concentrate myself on her merely visual aspect. And here, again, I am disappointed. Of course it is very wonderful that a woman should be fashioned —or rather, should have contrived to fashion herself—thus. How many hours (I have often asked myself), on how many cold grey mornings, and in what large, bare, locked room, at the back of what house, must have gone to the making of this strange shape? Nature is not, of course, a conscious artist. She aims at usefulness, not at beauty. The reason why arms are slighter than legs is not, I presume, that any first principle in beauty demands that they should be so. Arms are slighter than legs because they have not to sustain the burden of the body. And thus we, who know no first principle in beauty, and derive our ideas of beauty through what we know to be useful, would be really repelled

at sight of a woman whose arms preponderated over her legs. Such a phenomenon might be achieved if a woman were trained from childhood to walk on the palms of her hands. Suppose, on the contrary, a woman who had been trained from childhood not to use her hands and arms for any purpose whatsoever. She, too, would be unsightly. The meagreness of her arms, in proportion to the rest of her, would seem to us unlovely. And yet her arms would be not more meagre in proportion to her legs than are the arms in proportion to the legs of a ballerina. I do not say that the structure of a ballerina is an offence against abstract beauty; for I have no means of knowing what abstract beauty is. But certainly this structure jars my æsthetic sense, as being an obvious deviation from what is natural. It is natural enough that a woman should dance sometimes, just as it is natural that she should walk, sit, lie down. But it is unnatural that dancing should be the business of her life. And Nature takes vengeance by destroying her symmetry, by making her ridiculous. Poor ballerina! Is it for this that she has been toiling, toiling, day by day, in that large, bare, back-room—toiling to become physically ridiculous? That is a question that has often asked itself in my brain during the performance of a ballet. All those trippings, and pirouettings, and posturings at incredible angles, are very wonderful of course, and are paid for at a very high rate. If the ballerina is not extravagant, she will be able to retire into private life, with a comfortable income, before old age shall have overtaken her. She will be able to cease to be ridiculous. Meanwhile my heart goes out to her. It comes in again quickly. There had been no need to pity her. Regret is all that was needed. Such power of thought as she may once have had was long since absorbed into her toes. She does not know that she is ridiculous. Her fixed smile is no assumption to hide an aching heart. She really fancies that she is admirable, admired. And so she is, in the way that a performing dog is admirable, admired.

A NOTE ON THE BALLET

It is wonderful that a dog can learn to behave more or less like a human being. It is wonderful that a human being can learn to cut capers seemingly beyond human power. But dog and human being alike cause in us—in those of us, at least, who are a little thoughtful—more of sorrow than of pleasure. My sentimentalism rejoices in the survival of the ballet. But my humanitarianism is revolted by the survival of the ballerina . . . Mlle. Genée? Ah no; I grant an exception there. No monstrous automaton is that young lady. Perfect though she is in the "haute école", she has by some miracle preserved her own self. She was born a comedian, and a comedian she remains, light and liberal as foam. A mermaid were not a more surprising creature than she—she of whom one half is as that of an authentic ballerina, whilst the other is that of a most intelligent, most delightfully human actress. A mermaid were, indeed, less marvellous in our eyes. She would not be able to defuse any semblance of humanity into her tail. Mlle. Genée's intelligence seems to vibrate to her very toes. Her dancing, strictliest classical though it is, is a part of her acting. And her acting, moreover, is of so fine a quality that she makes the old ineloquent conventions of gesture tell their meanings to me, and tell them so exquisitely that I quite forget my craving for words. In "Coppélia", which is now being enacted at the Empire, Mlle. Genée has a longer and better part than she has yet played. And the delight she gives us is accordingly greater than ever. . . . Taglioni in "Les Arabesques"? I suspect, in my heart of hearts, she was no better than a doll. Grisi in "Giselle"? She may, or may not, have been passable. Genée! It is a name that our grandchildren will cherish, even as we cherish now the names of those bygone dancers. And alas! our grandchildren will never believe, will never be able to imagine, what Genée was.

IBSEN

May 26, 1906.

Sometimes, when a great man dies, it is difficult to believe that he is dead. In a sense, it is difficult to believe this of Ibsen. He was the only Norwegian who excited any interest outside Norway. He alone was "good copy" for the journalists who supply Europe with Norwegian news. And thus, during recent years, we had read again and again that he was dying. Finding that he always lived on, we had ceased, at length, to be credulous. We had begun to think Ibsen immortal. And now, something of the incredibility of those rumours that he was dying attaches itself to the very news of his death. Those ever-recurring rumours had seemed to be so essential a feature of the modern newspaper. It is difficult to believe that there will be no more of them.

Ibsen's, however, is not one of those deaths which are in themselves hard to realise. Had he died some years ago, when he was still one of the vital forces of the world, the sudden blank would indeed have taxed our imagination. But, as it is, the force had long ago been spent. Six years have passed since Ibsen gave us "When We Dead Awaken". And that play, interesting and valuable though it was in its significance, was the work of an evidently failing hand. It was evidently, moreover, meant to be an epilogue. The volcano was extinct. Had Ibsen died even after "John Gabriel Borkman", we should have suffered a tragic sense of loss, knowing not of what riches we had been robbed. But to the work that he began in 1850 he wrote "finis" in 1890. Nothing is not there that might have been. Our loss is a merely personal one.

Are we down-hearted? No. It was interesting to think of Ibsen as being still actually alive—as breathing the air that we breathed. But the thought sounded no echo in emotion. I can imagine that people must have been really touched and stirred by the thought of Walt Whitman's survival. I did not begin to read that poet till some time after he was dead. But I am old enough to have been thrilled by the fact that Robert Browning was still living, and to have felt the world emptier for me when he died. Great men may be divided into two classes: the loveable and the unloveable; and, as surely as Whitman and Browning are typical of the one class, Ibsen is typical of the other. "Friends," he wrote, in one of his letters to George Brandes, "are a costly luxury, and when one invests one's capital in a mission in life, one cannot afford to have friends. The expensiveness of friendship does not lie in what one does for one's friends, but in what one, out of regard for them, leaves undone. This means the crushing of many an intellectual germ." Ibsen had no lack of friends, so far as his genius attracted to him many men who were anxious to help him. And he used these men, unstintingly, when he had need of them. That volume of his correspondence, published not long ago, reveals him as an unabashed applicant for favours. Nor is this by any means to his discredit. The world was against him. He was poor, and a cast-away. He had to fight hard in order that he might fulfil the genius that was in him. It was well that he had no false delicacy in appealing to any one who could be of use to him. But, throughout that correspondence, one misses in him the sense of gratitude. One misses in him the capacity for friendship. Not one "intellectual germ" would he sacrifice on that altar. He was, indeed, a perfect type of the artist. There is something impressive, something magnificent and noble, in the spectacle of his absorption in himself—the impregnability of that rock on which his art was founded. But, as we know, other men, not less great than Ibsen, have managed to be

human. Some "intellectual germs" may thereby have perished. If so, they are to be mourned, duly. And yet, could we wish them preserved at the price that Ibsen paid for them? Innate in us is the desire to love those whom we venerate. To this desire, Ibsen, the very venerable, does not pander.

We need not, I think, condemn ourselves as sentimentalists, for being disappointed. I think we may fairly accuse Ibsen of a limitation. Out of strength cometh forth sweetness. The truth of this proverb is not always, I admit, obvious. The Dean of St. Patrick's, for example, was strong; and sweetness did certainly not exude from him, except in portions of his private correspondence. (Some day, perhaps, it will be found that Ibsen had a soft side to his nature. But that will not affect our general view of him as a writer, any more than Swift's private use of baby-language affects our general view of *him*.) Swift's strength lay in his intellect, and in his natural gift for literature; and a gigantic strength it was. But his harshness was not symptomatic of strength. It was symptomatic of a certain radical defect in himself. He was a Titan, not an Olympian. So was Ibsen, who, without Swift's particular defect, was but a shade less harsh in his outlook on the world. He was an ardent and tender lover of ideas; but mankind he simply could not abide. Indeed, I fancy he cared less for ideas as ideas than as a scourge for his fellow-creatures. Just now I spoke of him as having been an extinct volcano after "When We Dead Awaken"; and the application of that simile was more apt than it usually is. Volcanic he had ever been, from "Catilina" onwards. His plays were a sequence of eruptions, darkening the sky, growling and sending out flashes of light more unpleasant than the darkness, and overwhelming and embedding the panic-stricken fugitives. Much has been written about his "purpose" in this and that play. "Purpose", in the sense of wishing to reform this or that evil, he never had. Primarily, he was an artist, pure and simple, actuated by the artist's

joy in reproduction of human character as it appeared to his keen, unwandering eyes. But he had a joy within a joy: joy in the havoc he wrought. Vesuvius has no "purpose": it does but obey some law within itself. Ibsen obeyed some similar law, and differed from Vesuvius only in the conscious pleasure that he had in the law's fulfilment. Peace was repulsive to him because the world was repulsive. The world's green pastures, smiling so smugly up at him, must be scorched black with cinders: not otherwise could any good thing ever grow out of them. And if the good thing actually grew, of what use, pray, would it be? Down with it! Eruptions, destruction: nothing else matters. Liberty! What is the use of that, except as an incentive to unrest? "Rome," he writes to Brandes, after the proclamation of the republic, "was the one sanctuary in Europe, the one place that enjoyed true liberty—freedom from the political tyranny of liberty . . . The delicious longing for liberty—that is now a thing of the past. I for one am bound to confess that the only thing about liberty that I love is the fight for it; I care nothing about the possession of it." At any rate, he cared nothing about other people's possession of it.

Because the men in his plays are mostly scored off by the women, he has often been credited with a keen sympathy for the feminine sex. "Strong-minded" women used to regard him as their affectionate ally. It was not them he cared for, poor dears; it was only the scrimmage. Men were "up"; so "up" with women. Had Nature placed women in the ascendant, Ibsen would have been the first to tug them down. No dispassionate reader of his plays can fail to see that his sympathy with women is a mere reflex of his antipathy to their lords and masters. The general impression that he had tried to help the cause of their emancipation was enough to send him off at a tangent. You remember how flatly he denied, at a banquet given some years ago in his honour, that he had had any such purpose whatsoever.

He had merely, he declared, portrayed certain tendencies. For his part, he considered that woman's sphere was the home. Quite feminine tears were shed, thereupon, by strong-minded women in every quarter of the globe. And to those "droppings of moist tears" Ibsen, we may be sure, listened with grim pleasure.

It was a strange mind, this mind into which I have been peering. Posterity, too, I think, will always, from time to time, peer into it, with something of my own awe. Even when time shall have robbed the plays of the sharp savour that for us they have, Ibsen himself will be as dominant a figure as he is for us. Against his lack of love may be set the fact that he loved not even himself. Throughout his life an artist essentially, he wrote in "When We Dead Awaken" a savage attack on the artistic nature which he exemplified. And, feeble though this final play is in execution, it seems to me deadlier in intention than any of the others. Perhaps it is but another instance of Ibsen's egoism that he reserved his most vicious kick for himself.

YVETTE GUILBERT AND ALBERT CHEVALIER

June 23, 1906.

I WENT one afternoon this week to the Duke of York's Theatre, and saw Mme. Yvette Guilbert and Mr. Albert Chevalier in juxtaposition. It seemed appropriate that these two should be together. The name of each conjures up visions of the early 'nineties. Both were innovators in method and in subject-matter, Mr. Chevalier weaving a network of romance around costermongers, Mme. Guilbert depicting in hard, sharp outline the tragedies and comedies of the least pleasant persons in Paris. Years have passed, revising somewhat the aspect of both artists. Both were ethereal. Both are normally plump. And their outlook, not less than their aspect, has expanded. Mme. Guilbert's is no longer confined to "les trous dangereux", though she still keeps an eye on them. She ranges over the gay and harmless provinces of France, in the gay and harmless past. Poudrée, she sings of Brittany; and in a crinoline she warbles of Parthenay; and in a peculiar costume meant to suggest that of a bygone English peasant she essays the folk songs of our own counties. Mr. Chevalier, in like manner, is unfaithful to the Old Kent Road, and deems alien from himself nothing that is human. He does not, like Mme. Guilbert, dally with the past; but his range over the present is unbounded. Altogether, there is a distinct kinship between these two artists. And thus the differences between them have a certain significance, as illustrating the differences between French and English art.

No one, I imagine, will dispute the platitude that French acting is better than English. The points of superiority are many;

but the most noticeable of them all is the quickness and apparent ease with which (I speak, of course, generally) French mimes express as much as can by English mimes be expressed only with much deliberation and apparent effort. I cannot conceive a better illustration of this difference than is offered by Mr. Chevalier and Mme. Guilbert in double harness. M. Chevalier is not, of course, thoroughly English. He has Italian as well as French blood in his veins. And this admixture accounts for the vivacity of face and figure that surprised us so much in the early 'nineties, setting him so far apart from the ordinary music-hall artists that we had known. But, despite his cosmopolitan breeding, it was only on the English stage that he graduated. And so, despite his vivacity, he has never picked up the knack of ease and quickness. Indeed, his vivacity itself seems to act as a stumbling-block. He makes a dozen gestures, a dozen grimaces, when one would be ample. He suits the action to the word so insistently that every word, almost, has an action all to itself. Often the action is a very elaborate one, insomuch that when the way is clear, at length, for the next word, you have quite lost sight of the last word but one. In one of his rustic songs—"Wot vur do 'ee lov oi?"—he speaks of a kiss and of holding hands. Before he comes to the word "kiss" he violently kisses the air for quite a long time; and when he illustrated the holding of hands I feared that he would never, never unclasp them. Mr. Chevalier might reply that in this song he is merely illustrating the slowness of an agrestic mind. To which I should retort that every one of his other very diverse impersonations is marred by just that same extremity of slowness. Every one of them is admirably conceived; and the words, written by Mr. Chevalier himself, admirably express the conception. If only Mr. Chevalier would allow them and the conception a certain amount of liberty to take care of themselves! If only he would not overwhelm them with illustration! We may be fools,

but we are not such fools as he takes us for. His points do not need such an unconscionable amount of hammering, to drive them home for us. If he were the owner of an inexpressive face and voice and hands, then, perhaps, all this strenuousness of his would be indispensable. As a matter of fact, every part of him happens to be mercurial. Evidently he under-rates himself as much as us.

One reason why I deplore his passion for over-emphasis is that the songs, as songs, lose thereby their savour. The lilt of the music. All her acting is done within that right limitation. Yet tiently till Mr. Chevalier will sing another half bar or so; and we sit patiently wondering what sort of a tune it is. One of Mme. Guilbert's virtues is that she never forgets that a singer's first duty to a song is to sing it. Always she obeys the rhythm of the music. All her acting is done within that right limitation. Yet is not lost one tittle of the acting necessary to express the full meaning of the words. I do not think that her face, voice, and hands are more naturally eloquent than Mr. Chevalier's. But she knows just how much use to make of them. Notice, in the famous "Ma Grandmère", how perfectly she differentiates the words of the girl from those of the old woman, yet with hardly a perceptible pause, with hardly a perceptible change of key. Something happens in her eyes, and we know that it is the girl speaking: we see the girl herself; and then again, in another instant, we see the old woman. One can imagine the pauses with which Mr. Chevalier would mark these transitions, and the violent contortions he would go through before he got under weigh. And yet he would not make us realise the old woman and the girl half so vividly as does Mme. Guilbert. We should realise that he was performing an ingenious feat of character-acting. We should think him frightfully clever. But—well, it never strikes us that Mme. Guilbert is clever. She does but fill us with a perfect illusion of whatsoever scene she sings, of

whatever type she apes. How she does it is (at the moment of watching her) a mystery. And but for that mystery she couldn't do it.

Mme. Guilbert's restraint is so exquisite, she so perfectly effaces herself in the subjects of her songs, that I cannot understand how she has let herself fall into the habit of flinging restraint to the winds and luridly revealing herself when she sings the last line. In some of her songs this habit is absolutely fatal to the effect. Obviously, for example, "La Grandmère" ought to end on the note of quiet melancholy that has been struck throughout. (You remember the refrain:

"Combien je regrette
Mon bras si dodu,
Ma jambe bien faite,
Et le temps perdu.")

When Mme. Guilbert sings this refrain for the last time, she pauses after the third line, throws back her head, spreads out her arms to the audience and utters "et le temps perdu" in a tone of radiant ecstasy, as much as to say *"Haven't* I sung that well?" Again, at the end of "La Glu",—"le cœur disait, en pleurant, 'T'es tu fait mal, mon pauvre enfant?' "—it is obvious that the words ought to be spoken quite faintly. Mme. Guilbert drives them home with an emphasis which not Mr. Chevalier himself could surpass. We lose all sense that it is the heart of the murdered mother that is speaking. We lose all the piteousness of the song. We are conscious only of Mme. Guilbert demanding applause. I have often heard her sing both these songs. I am sure she used not to spoil them thus.

MR. SHAW'S RODERICK HUDSON

November 24, 1906.

When an artist takes a theme which has already been taken by another and very different artist, comparison of the two works is sure to amuse us, and will probably, too, instruct us, helping us to realise the peculiarities of each man more clearly than before.

One of Mr. Henry James' earliest themes was a youth endowed with artistic genius, but not endowed with moral sense. Roderick Hudson, whom you doubtless remember—for who, having read the book, could forget him?—went about "using" people quite unscrupulously, taking everything, giving nothing except his fascination, and caring not a jot how much distress he inflicted on the people around him. Louis Dubedat, the central figure of Mr. Shaw's new play, is, essentially, just such another as Roderick Hudson. But Mr. Shaw is, essentially, not just such another as Mr. Henry James. Indeed I cannot imagine two minds, or two artistic methods, more divergent than the Shavian and the Jacobean. Mr. James must excuse my invention of this adjective. To Mr. Shaw I need not apologise, for "Shavian" was invented by himself. He was the first to feel the need of that adjective. He has ever been conscious of himself as a peculiar, definite, detached force—a light that must not be hidden under a bushel. Mr. James, on the other hand, has never seemed to have that kind of self-consciousness (a word which I use in no derogatory sense). So far as he is conscious of self, he is eager only for self-effacement. He has used the "first person singular" very often in his stories; but only because he can observe his characters the more closely by playing some subordinate

part in their midst. He is devoted, passionately, to his art—the art of portraying men and women as he sees them. He never judges men and women. Or rather, he never pronounces judgment. No industrious and intuitive reader of his books can have failed to deduce that he has a very strong moral sense. He hates selfishness. He loves honour—loves, indeed, a sense of honour so punctilious that its effects are apt to be rather exasperating to readers who are only averagely good. But he never lets his moral prejudices be prejudicial to his characters. He never tries to set in an unduly attractive light the things that he loves, or to blacken the things that he hates. The hand of the artist in him is held tightly over the mouth of the preacher. In Mr. Shaw, the preacher is ever vocal. Not that the artist in him is weak or idle: he manfully tries that all the characters shall have fair play. The preacher disapproves strongly of them, for the most part. They are all, with few exceptions, on the penitents' bench. But the artist insists that they shall all have their say, and a respectful hearing. And the ratiocinator (who is even stronger than the preacher in Mr. Shaw, and stronger far than the artist) insists that they shall all, severally, score—to the greater glory of G. B. S.

Louis Dubedat scores right and left. He is always scoring. He scores even under the shadow of death. And Mr. Shaw has, moreover, been as anxious to make his death-bed pathetic as was Dickens to make Little Nell's. And, where Dickens failed, Mr. Shaw has succeeded. The pathos here is real. I defy you not to be touched by it, while it lasts. But I defy you, when it is over, to mourn. Even if the curtain fell on Dubedat's dying breath, you would feel that his death was a good riddance. In point of fact, the curtain does not fall for some time. We hear the unemotional comments of the doctors, varied by the very emotional comments of one of them. I could feel that the audience did not like this. And, though I have not, at the moment of

writing, read any of the criticisms, I am sure that Mr. Shaw has been more or less violently attacked for lack of taste. Certainly the scene was rather painful. But if it was a true scene, what matter? And it *is* true that doctors do not take death emotionally. The sentimental platitudes uttered by one of the doctors in this scene would not have been uttered by him in real life, for the sole benefit of his colleagues. In that respect, the scene is untrue. But let no one suggest that these platitudes, absurd though they are, are not very like the kind of thing that would be said, at such a juncture, by a rather stupid layman. Clever people, in the midst of great emotion, say nothing; for they know that whatever they might say would be inadequate. Stupid people rush into speech, speech not one whit more ridiculous than this doctor's. No, Mr. Shaw was not merely "playing for a laugh". He was trying to reproduce a thing that exists in life. And his error was but in forgetting that this man was a doctor addressing himself to his colleagues. There was no "error of taste", such as, I am sure, he has been accused of. Nor was there an error of art. For, as I have said, we do not, after a moment, feel the slightest desire to mourn Dubedat.

And yet we have never ceased to mourn Roderick Hudson. He was a selfish brute, but he cast his spell as surely over us readers as he did over all the characters in the book. We, too, would have gladly sacrificed ourselves to his convenience. We believed in his genius. Those few things that he wrought—the Adam, the Eve, the bust of his mother, and one or two others —were as real to us and as fine as though we had beheld them with our own eyes. And when Roderick Hudson died we thought of all those blocks of marble from which beauty would never spring now. Mr. James has a wonderful way of imagining and describing works of art. He infects us with his own enthusiasm. The works of art are as real to us as they are to him. Fortunately his books are not illustrated with reproductions of some

artist's notion of the masterpieces described. Such illustrations, however admirable, would tend to damp our enthusiasm. And, doubtless, one of the reasons why we do not fervently believe in the genius of Louis Dubedat is that we see his work. I do not say that they are not "able", these sketches on the walls of his studio. Evidently, Dubedat could have earned plenty of money as a "black and white man" on an illustrated weekly paper. And the posthumous "one man show" is a revelation of his versatility. Dubedat seems to have caught, in his brief lifetime, the various styles of *all* the young lions of the Carfax Gallery. Budding genius is always, I know, imitative; but not so frantically imitative as all that. Nor was Dubedat exactly a budding genius. We are asked to accept him as a soon-to-be-recognised master. Of course, it is not Mr. Shaw's fault that the proper proofs are not forthcoming. But it certainly is a fault in Mr. Shaw that he wished proper proofs to forthcome. He ought to have known that even if actual masterpieces by one unknown man could have been collected by the property-master, we should yet have wondered whether Dubedat was so very remarkable after all. Masterpieces of painting must be left to an audience's imagination. And Mr. Shaw's infringement of so obvious a rule is the sign of a certain radical lack of sensitiveness in matters of art. Only by suggestion can these masterpieces be made real to us. And how can this suggestion be made to us? Clearly, by the character and conversation of the artist himself as presented on the stage, and (in a lesser degree) by what is said of his work by other persons in the play.

The other persons in the play say a good deal about Dubedat's work. Mrs. Dubedat, especially, dwells on it. But a wife's evidence is no more admissible in the case of an artist than in the case of a man charged with murder. One of the doctors is a connoisseur, and freely buys Dubedat's work. But the evidence of one connoisseur is not final. We examine Dubedat

himself. He talks much, and well, about art. So do many quite bad painters. Indeed, it is generally the quite bad painters who are most fluent. Good painters think rather with their eyes and hands than with their brains, and thus have a difficulty in general conversation. If you coax them from silence, they will describe illuminatively, but they cannot ratiocinate: that is not their business. It is very much the business of Louis Dubedat. As I have said, he scores right and left. He has among strangers none of the shyness and the unreadiness of a man who can paint. And he "knocks off" brilliant sketches on the backs of menus with all the good-nature of a man who can't. In a word, we disbelieve in him as a genius. Only as a scamp is he real to us.

And his very scampishness is of a kind that would destroy any illusion we might have of him as a great painter. His is not the large, vague unscrupulousness of self-centred genius. It is the "slimness" of the confidence-trick man. When I said that Dubedat was "essentially" the same as Roderick Hudson, I meant, of course, that Mr. Shaw's intention had been the same as Mr. James'. But Mr. Shaw's deep-rooted disgust for the unmoral artist has prevented him, despite his constant efforts at fairness, from presenting this figure worthily. The ever-quick succession of petty impostures played by Dubedat is, of course, vastly amusing, but . . . . why all these buts? Why have I been carping all this while about the central figure, instead of expressing the joy that the whole brilliant play gave me, and trying to communicate something of that joy to you? I evidently haven't yet learnt my business.

THE CAMPDEN WONDER

January 12, 1907.

This sounds rather like a rose, but is something very different indeed. In Campden, in the seventeenth century, lived a certain Mrs. Perry, a widow with two sons. Neither of the sons was clever, but Richard, the younger, was good, and John, the elder, was bad. Richard earned higher wages than John, who spent the greater part of his time in drinking. The two quarrelled; and John determined to avenge himself for the taunts that had been thrown at him by Richard. Mr. Harrison, their master, had been missing for several days. Would it not, John asked himself, be a good thing to accuse himself, his mother, and Richard, of having murdered Mr. Harrison for gold? The more he thought the plan over, the better he liked it. And, in due course, the three were sent to the gallows. Just after they had been hanged, Mrs. Harrison arrived at the gaol to announce that her husband had come safely home.

Such, briefly, is the story which Mr. John Masefield tells us. And, on the whole, very well he tells it. The first of the three scenes is rather tedious, by reason of the manner of the quarrel between the brothers. "Ye're a drunken sot, John Perry." "No, I bain't." "Yes, you be." "Oh, I'm a drunken sot, am I?" "Yes, and you're a disgrace to Campden." "No, I bain't." "Yes, you be." "Oh, I'm a disgrace to Campden, am I?" John says Richard has "crossed him" in his work. Richard denies that. John repeats it. Richard then calls him a drunken sot; and so on, round and round, interminably. Now, I dare say that the Gloucestershire peasants in the seventeenth century did not excel in the bright

cut and thrust of controversy. I have no doubt that this scene between John and Richard is perfectly true to life—so far as it goes. For perfect truth, I dare say, it ought to go much further. But perfect truth to life is not art. And this scene, even so far as it goes, is very much too long. It is right that we should feel the dulness of these two peasant minds. But dulness is a thing which the artist should suggest. He ought not to drill it into us. Mr. Masefield ought to have started his play in the middle of the quarrel: "I tell's ee agen, John Perry, ye're a drunken sot," &c. My idea of the dialect may not be sound. But Mr. Masefield will perceive that dramatically I am right. For he has a very keen instinct for drama. The second scene—the scene of the confession—abounds in dramatic touches; and the third scene—the gaol scene—is so constructed that nothing is lacking to the full horror of the story; and this horror is intensified by various expedients, such as the mother's unfaltering tenderness for her son John, and as the ornate platitudes of the parson, and as the cheerfully querulous garrulity of Mrs. Harrison when she arrives and wonders where are the prisoners for whom she has brought the good news. Oh yes, the whole thing is decidedly harrowing.

Decidedly harrowing, also, is the sight of a man having a fit in the street. If that sort of incident were cleverly dramatised, it would be decidedly harrowing on the stage. Why doesn't clever Mr. Masefield proceed to dramatise it? I think I hear him say "Because it would be inartistic. Because it would be horror for horror's sake." And pray, what else is "The Campden Wonder"? I am not, as my readers know, squeamish. I have no patience with critics who, off-hand, condemn a play because the theme of it is painful—"morbid", as they used to call it. There is nothing necessarily morbid in what isn't cheerful. "Othello", for example, isn't morbid. Life, as a whole, isn't morbid, though it abounds in tragedy. I consider that one

of the main faults of our modern stage is the dearth of tragedies. Why do our dramatists (Mr. Shaw excepted) so carefully eschew every tragic element in life? "Yes, why?" echoes Mr. Masefield. "And why not, therefore," (I told you he was clever) "be a little more cordial about 'The Campden Wonder'?" "Because," I reply, "it has not enough relation to life." Yet the things narrated in it actually happened? Oh yes, I remember being told the story some years ago, and remarking "How very curious!" Suppose that the actual facts had been pleasant instead of painful. Suppose that John Perry had one day received a message announcing that he was the rightful earl of the district, and his mother the dowager countess; and suppose that Richard Perry, on that same day, had discovered a gold-mine under his garden; and suppose that this access of general good fortune had so sobered John that he lived happily ever after in the bosom of his family. If that had been the story repeated to me, I should have said with equal fervour "How very curious!" But, had any one suggested that it would make a good play, I should have pointed out that it was really *too* curious for that purpose. Similarly, John Perry's determination to avenge himself on his brother by sending himself and his brother and his (quite unoffending) mother to the gallows is really *too* curious to be squared with the requirements of tragic art. John Perry is obviously not a responsible person; and, for the pivot of a tragedy, we (lacking the Greeks' belief in maleficent deities) must have human responsibility: no lunatic need apply. Conceivably, if "The Campden Wonder" were not a mere unrelated episode in three scenes, but a full-sized play, and if John Perry were not a half-witted drunkard . . . but no! if John Perry were but a normally bad human being, he would not, with however great a motive for vengeance, behave as he does here. "Normally!" laughs Mr. Masefield. And I admit that critics have often angrily flourished the word "normal" in the eyes of artists whose

themes have merely been not commonplace. Though the greatest themes are the commonplace themes, certainly, I would not venture to hinder an artist from availing himself of strange themes. But, again, such themes must be normally strange. The sort of thing that could never have happened before, and could never happen again, is all very well as the subject of an anecdote in conversation; but art needs for its theme something that is, at least somewhere, rooted in life. Be the theme pleasant or unpleasant, and more especially if it be unpleasant, it must have also some measure of significance. "The Campden Wonder" means nothing. It is (if I may quote the striking words that I made Mr. Masefield use in a similar connexion) horror for horror's sake. I hope Mr. Masefield will soon find some theme worthy of his evident power for tragedy. Then I shall go and be harrowed with the greatest pleasure.

"THE PHILANDERER"

February 9, 1907.

In the early 'nineties Ibsen began to flutter the London dovecots, and every one was violently either an Ibsenite or an anti-Ibsenite, and much that was foolish was loudly said by each of the two sects. The New Woman appeared, springing (as she supposed) full-armed from the brain of Ibsen, who in later years unkindly denied paternity; and she founded a club or two, amidst howls of obloquy. I was too young to be in the scrimmage, but its echoes penetrated to the place where I was being educated, and I remember hearing that a man named Bernard Shaw had written a satire on it—a play which, if produced, would restore general good-humour. The play never was produced, and I heard no more of it until, in the late 'nineties, Mr. Shaw, already much more than a name to me, published it among his "unpleasant" plays. As a satire, it seemed to me rather stale then: Ibsen had ceased to be a cause of silliness: Ibsenites and anti-Ibsenites had vanished, and the New Woman with them. Nor, on the other hand, had they been gone long enough for us to appreciate a reminder of them. Molière's satire on the précieuses ridicules must have seemed rather stale within a decade of its first performance. Mr. Gilbert's "Patience" would have seemed rather stale in 1890. But it was all right (so quickly does time fly) when I saw it performed four or five years ago. And doubtless "The Philanderer", as revived by Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker in 1920 or thenabouts, will be more mirth-provoking than it is at this moment.

It is a great pity that the royal family had not already in the

early 'nineties discovered Mr. Shaw and thus drawn down on him the favour of the British public. How splendidly, by comparison, "The Philanderer", produced at the time when it was written, would have "gone"! How gaily these squibs would have snapped and sparkled, and these rockets have rushed into the empyrean, and with how sharp a lustre would have lingered in our memory the "set piece" of G. B. S. smiling sardonically through at us! Time has damped these fireworks. The rockets ascend, but not radiantly, and we are less dazzled by their flight than hurt by the downfall of the sticks. The sticks are very heavy—more like clubs than they ought to be. I think that even in the early 'nineties they would have somewhat marred the show. Even then they would have been rather a drag on the rockets, though we should not have been so sharply as now we are conscious of their impact on our heads. By his duality of equipment—his intense earnestness and his overwhelming high spirits—Mr. Shaw has often been discommoded in his work. It is just this duality that makes him so interesting a figure, and I would not that he were otherwise than the gods made him. But it cannot be denied that his plays, as works of art, are often marred by this duality. And none of his plays, I think, is marred more evidently than "The Philanderer".

Whether an artist be bent on pleasing or on preaching, or on both these functions, he should aim at unity of effect. There cannot, indeed, be any real effect without unity. There must, then, be unity of method. A play need not, of course, be wholly serious or wholly frivolous throughout. But either the seriousness must be evidently the main thing, with frivolity as a mere relief, or the seriousness must be a mere make-weight to the frivolity. Sometimes Mr. Shaw has contrived to work in accordance to this canon. But more often he loses control of the two sides of his nature, and the result, albeit delicious in itself, is not what he, as an artist, intended, and not what we, apart from

our delight in him as a human being, can most thoroughly enjoy.

What did he, as an artist, intend "The Philanderer" to be? I doubt whether he ever made up his mind. After a lapse of years, finding himself compelled to label it, he labelled it "unpleasant", as I have already reminded you. "The scene with which it opens," he said in his preface, "the atmosphere in which it proceeds, and the marriage with which it ends, are, for the intellectually and artistically conscious classes in modern society, typical; and it will hardly be denied, I think, that they are unpleasant." It is one of the play's faults that we do not know how far the unpleasantness goes. What sort of a philanderer is Leonard Charteris? What was his relation to Julia Craven? It may have been one kind of relation, and it may have been the other. Nowhere in the play is there any definite information on this vital point. However, even supposing that there had been no actual "intrigue", the Charteris type is doubtless a harmful one, and to be deplored by sociologists. Mr. Shaw might have written a really edifying play around that type. Doubtless, this was his intention; but equally his intention was to write a light-hearted topical extravaganza. The result is a real person in fantastic surroundings which prevent us from believing in his reality, and which make the inherent unpleasantness of him seem a mere wanton intrusion of unpleasantness for its own sake. To a certain extent, indeed, even if the play were a serious one, Charteris would be more unpleasant than Mr. Shaw ought to have made him. He would not, in real life, have said to a woman whom he very much wished to please, and especially not to a woman of Grace Tranfield's kind, "you must marry some one else; and then I'll come and philander with you." He would very likely have *thought* it; but a certain grace and fastidiousness in speech are characteristic of the Charteris type. Barring one or two blots of this kind, however, Charteris is

really well drawn, and in a more than nominally "unpleasant" play would be thoroughly effective. As it is, Mr. Shaw's study of him is robbed of its force and point by Mr. Shaw's extraneous high spirits. Nothing but the unpleasantness (aggravated) remains. And furthermore, as I have suggested, this unpleasantness mars the prevailing fun. Some day in the far future, when Mr. Shaw finds his fertility beginning to fail, so that there will be time for him to dally with the past, he might well amuse himself by turning "The Philanderer" into two plays. The world will be ready, in that distant period, to enjoy fully a blithe satire on the foibles of the early 'nineties; and, of course, there will still be philanderers.

UNATTRACTIVE, UNDRAMATISED

February 23, 1907.

Dramatists in our day have often been blamed for their neglect of the middle class as a material for their art. Their defence, I take it, would be a plea that the middle class is less interesting than the upper class. The middle class, they would say, is a struggling class; its units are preoccupied by various petty devices in the daily struggle for life, and have no time in which to be themselves, to develop themselves, to cultivate their intellects and their senses; and have, moreover, no time for just those things which go to the making of comedy and tragedy.

This defence seems, at first glance, rather plausible. If you will walk, any morning or afternoon, through Westbourne Grove (say) or the High Street of Notting Hill, you will note a dreary uniformity, and an uniform dreariness, in the faces of the ladies who are "out shopping". What anxious, lack-lustre eyes, what tightly compressed mouths, what drab skins they have! And how inexpressive of any sense of life, of any self-respect even, is their shuffling gait! You feel that they are doing their duty, but doing it without the faintest satisfaction; and you feel that for anything beyond their round of petty tasks they have nothing at all left over. Many of them are accompanied by daughters; and these girls, for the most part, look as joyless as their mothers—less strained, of course, less anxious, but staring dismally forth into the future when they, too, (if they have the luck to marry) will have "responsibilities". They are prematurely old, these girls; and so are their mothers. If, again, you will travel westwards on the Oxford Street Tube, between the

hours of five and seven, you will find that the fathers and sons returning from the City make on you just the same impression as do the mothers and daughters. Anxiety, dulness, and fatigue—no time left over for life; no capacity for any vital emotion of joy or grief. You will be somewhat consoled for sight of these spectres if you will betake yourself, at any hour of the day, to Mayfair or St. James's. There you will have a sense that life really is being lived, and that eyes and arms are opened bravely to all its possibilities. You will see people obviously thriving on life. The men are rubicund, keen-looking, and hold themselves erect, and walk with a swing. And how childishly happy look the women in the landaulettes—never more childishly happy than when they are assuming an air of languor. And how young they all look, how unlined! Not of one of them could you say that she is old. Some of them, of course, must be old according to the calendar. Some of them are accompanied by daughters; but, unless the landaulette happens to be blocked by the traffic, you will never be able to guess which is the mother, which the daughter, absurdly juvenile though the daughter always looks.

How do they manage it? Partly, doubtless, by never staying for more than five consecutive days in London, and by spending always a great deal of time in the open air, and by being careful of their diet. But I think the essence of their secret is in their freedom from small anxieties and inconveniences. Some of them, of course, are not rich proportionately to the display which they have to make. But at least their difficulties are not those petty and daily difficulties which, unless I am utterly mistaken, are the carvers of those wrinkles on the faces of the average man and woman in the middle class—the strainers of those features, the robbers of colour from those cheeks. The upper class does not wait for omnibuses at corners, calculating that a green omnibus will convey it to a point whence a red

omnibus will deposit it within walking distance of its destination. For it, no scramble to get into the besieged vehicle, and no fumbling in pockets for the fare. For it no interviews with rate-collectors; no snappings of boot-laces, nor any lost collar-studs; and no desperate expedients to make old things look new. Butlers, valets, maids, tradesmen glad to extend unlimited credit, and many other faithful functionaries, are there to stand between the upper class and those horrors with which the middle class has to grapple unaided. You, reader, if you are, like me, a member of the middle class, living from hand to mouth, know how grim a thing that constant grapple is. Suppose that you are going abroad, or going to stay with friends in the country. You consult your pass-book, tremulously: yes, you will just have enough to buy the several necessary articles of personal adornment (necessary, for when did you ever find your wardrobe perfectly prepared for even your briefest excursion?) and to take a return ticket (you have tremulously consulted the A B C Guide), and to have a margin left over for personal expenses, and for "tips"—"tips": how your heart sinks under that inauspicious word! More wrinkles, deeper wrinkles, I think, have been carved by the calculation and bestowal of "tips" than by any other agency. Assuredly, going away from London is no joke for you. But suppose yourself nobly born. Suppose yourself, for example, a king, or a prince of the blood royal. Your valet, or valets, without a word from you, will have packed much more than everything that you could possibly need for whatsoever personal emergency, whatsoever variation in climate. Your secretary will have ordered the special train. Your equerry will have ordered the brougham. The directors of the railway company will have ordered the crimson carpet along which you, without having yet exerted yourself in the slightest degree, will have the slight exertion of passing to your own saloon carriage, where a hearty meal will be served to you by

your own footmen. True, you will have to shake hands cordially with one or two of the directors, as you pass, and smile graciously, and pause to ask an intelligent question or two. But any Prince's any handshake is construed as cordial, his any smile as gracious, his any question as intelligent: you need not be alarmed. After your meal, while you smoke one of your own cigars in preference to those provided by the directors, you need fear no "smash": there is a pilot engine for you. Smoothly, swiftly, your train rushes, with never a pause, to its destination. The reporters who are assembled to watch you "alight" will inform the nation that you "bore no traces of the fatigue of the journey", and will marvel at you as a prodigy of endurance, and will pay solemn tribute to your "indefatigability in the performance of public duty". Yet there is not one of them but suffers in a day more wear and tear than you suffer in the whole course of your illustrious and beneficent life, Sir.

A traveller who is merely a member of the upper class has as easy a time as a king or prince has. True, there is no red carpet for him, and no pilot engine; but neither are there any directors to be grasped by his hand, nor any reporters to make him ridiculous in the eyes of people who can discriminate. I do not say that I furiously envy these blest travellers. They know not the sense of triumph and repose that comes to you and me when, after all that struggle and scramble, we find ourselves at length safely ensconced in the railway-carriage. They, who are always leaving London, cannot savour the full joy of escape. Providence is never altogether unjust, even in this world. We can always point to compensations. Still, it would be nicer not to deserve compensations. It would be nicer to have quite smooth, pink faces, and quite buoyant gaits, as the members of the upper class have. It would be nice to have as much physical vitality as they have—to have been so little exhausted as they have been.

An intense physical vitality, due to the absence of petty vexation? As I have suggested, we look as though we were. It is quite they correspondingly superior to us in spiritual vitality? Are we less capable than they in the matter of thought and of emotion? As I have suggested, we look as though we were. It is quite natural that our dramatists, being for the most part rather superficial persons, should suppose that we actually are. But, if our dramatists will condescend to make our acquaintance (or rather cease from trying to persuade themselves that they don't know us), they will find that we, too, the unmentioned by Debrett, the jaded in aspect, have brains and hearts. They will find that we, too, have a life of our own—quite an interesting, amusing, exciting life, a life quite rich in comedy and in tragedy. They will find that we, too, are capable of great joys and griefs, and that such things come our way quite often, really.

FANTASY IN DISTRESS

April 6, 1907.

To Mr. W. J. Locke, whose new play, "The Palace of Puck", was produced last Tuesday at the Haymarket, my heart goes out in a gush of pity. Not that his play is unworthy of him; nor that it was received unkindly. It is (in itself) a most delightful thing. Also, the whole audience, throughout, seemed to be in raptures. Nevertheless, I was glad I was not Mr. Locke. Rapturously summoned to show himself, he bowed in a modest, deprecating way to the mimes on either side of him, and made a modest, deprecating gesture to the audience, thus trying to convey to it that really *he* had had very little to do with what it had just been enjoying so much—that what *he* had conceived and shaped was something totally different from what the mimes had made of it. His deportment was as urbane as could be; but inwardly, I wager, he was raging at the public's obtuseness in not having broken up the benches and asked for its money back. One little hope, perhaps, he clung to: surely the critics, men of trained judgment, versed in all the minutiæ not less of the art of acting than of dramaturgic art, had perceived and would in due course proclaim the true state of affairs. Ah, broken reeds! "It would be affectation to pretend that the author is not indebted to a considerable extent to his interpreters." This exquisite phrase, culled from one of last Wednesday's newspapers, is typical of what the reputed experts came out with. I suppose I shall be thought awfully affected when I declare that only to Mr. Esmond, among the four principal "interpreters", does Mr. Locke owe anything at all, and that, on the other

hand, Mr. Frederick Kerr, Miss Marion Terry, and Miss Miriam Clements do urgently owe him something: a handsome apology, backed by a petition to Mr. Harrison to release them from their contracts and substitute for them people who can enter a little into the spirit of the play.

The play's genesis was evidently in a vision that once came to Mr. Locke—and what young artist has not been visited by the vision?—of some green French valley in which painters, poets, musicians, and grisettes dwell together under the roof of an enlightened patron, talking art and love, to an accompaniment of popping champagne corks. And what fun it would be, mused Mr. Locke, if there strayed into this earthly paradise a middle-aged husband and wife from one of the suburbs of London! A play might be made from that contrast. Not a play of fun merely: plenty of scope for sentiment: the prosaic couple gradually yielding to the magic of the place, each falling in love with one of the beautiful residents, and thus recapturing the secret which they, too, had once possessed, and finally falling with rapture into each other's arms. Fantastic? Of course. And Mr. Locke was careful not to break his butterfly—careful to keep it fluttering in the air, and not to guide its poor little feet along the pavement. He took good care that Mr. and Mrs. Podmore should be symbols, not persons, and wafted them from Stoke-Tootington, a place not on the map. If they were presented as definite persons, and not as exaggerated types of suburban life, then the story of them would be merely a commonplace stagey perversion of probabilities; and the earthly paradise, their background, brought through them to the test of actuality, would be shorn of all its charm for us. Mr. Podmore must talk as no man ever talked: he must "disapprove" of everything, however harmless; he must have become narrower, pettier, stupider than any man ever was. He must, also, not look real. Mutton-chop whiskers are no longer worn, but they still thrive as a symbol

(and as an inspiration to the soul of Mr. Frank Richardson); and I am sure Mr. Locke would have liked Mr. Podmore to wear them, and had even decided on the colour—mouse colour. Within five minutes of his introduction to Mr. Kerr, he must, however, have perceived that here was a man with whom the subject of whiskers could not be broached. And I daresay the rehearsals had not gone very far before Mr. Locke perceived that here was a man who, without being born again, could never enter into the spirit in which Mr. Podmore needs to be played. Mr. Kerr stands, as it were, firmly rooted on the steps of Boodle's, and doggedly refuses to budge from his accustomed pitch one inch in the direction of Stoke-Tootington. His clothes, his gait, his voice, everything about him, is as inexorably Boodleian as it has ever been. Even when, in the last act, he appears in fancy dress, he is far from cutting the ridiculous figure that Mr. Locke must have fondly conceived. Mr. Podmore suddenly transformed into the semblance of a beau of the eighteenth century! Mr. Locke must have laughed in anticipative sympathy with the roars of laughter that would hail that situation. As it was, Mr. Kerr forfeited no tittle of his dignity, the audience respectfully admiring his easy, natural demeanour: the clock had been put back more than a century, but St. James's Street is not recent: Mr. Kerr was still himself. Quietly, authoritatively, from first to last, he walked through, never for one instant demeaning himself by lightly hinting to the audience that the part assigned to him was but the incarnation of a comic abstraction. Had he been playing in realistic comedy, he could not have more steadily refused to "play for the laugh". When Mr. Locke caused Mr. Podmore to find his daughter embracing an art-student, and to cry, "What is the meaning of this?" he intended, of course, that all the horror of outraged Stoke-Tootington should be expressed in that cry, in those upraised hands. Mr. Kerr does not raise his voice, does not even take his hand out of his trouser-pocket,

simply walks across the stage uttering the words in a stolid undertone. Even in real life a father would not be quite so phlegmatic. But it is obviously at realism that Mr. Kerr aims, here as throughout the play. "Hang it all, no! I *won't* make an ass of myself!" seems to be his motto. An admirable motto to live up to—except when one has undertaken to play an essentially ridiculous part in a fantastic entertainment. Mr. Kerr should not accept such parts. It is unfair to the author.

Mr. Podmore's wife is a good deal less ridiculous than he; and thus Miss Marion Terry's performance is a good deal less inept than Mr. Kerr's. But the main point about Mrs. Podmore is that she, like her husband, is a symbol of middle-aged suburbanism rejuvenated and illuminated by fresh experience. And Miss Marion Terry is from the outset as lively and picturesque and young and delicately mundane as ever I saw her; and thus the play at its turning-point stands still. Miss Miriam Clements, playing the artist's model who captivates Mr. Podmore, seems less like a mercurial siren in a fantasy than like an admirably well-behaved lady joining in a charade. She is altogether without "abandon". Partly, perhaps, this is due to deficiency in technique. One is conscious of the process by which she puts her arms akimbo, and one sees her leaving them so till it occurs to her that she ought to be doing something with her hands, and then one sees her studiously putting her hands behind her back; and so on. But I think her rather formal ways are also, to a certain extent, intentional. She wishes to remind us that the Palace of Puck is a perfectly respectable place really. And this is by no means an inartistic impulse. For the realism of Mr. Kerr and Miss Terry has already made the Palace seem to us like a real place, to be judged by standards of actuality; and we know that in real life a house conducted on such lines would very soon be raided by the police; and so we are glad to know that there will be no evidence to secure Puck's conviction in

court. It is well that our sense of impending doom—so alien from Mr. Locke's intention—should thus be banished. Puck himself could not be better played than by Mr. Esmond, who has caught exactly the spirit of Mr. Locke's fantasy, and is unafraid to express it with all his might. Mr. Ben Webster, also, as the musician who fascinates Mrs. Podmore, plays in a key of extravagant romanticism which is just right. But these two cannot undo the mischief wrought by the others. It is a pity. I could have told Mr. Harrison exactly what would happen to the play as cast by him. He evidently thought that nothing would matter so long as he engaged a number of expensive and popular mimes. And, in a sense, he was right. The public is enraptured, and the critics are quite well pleased. Only—poor Mr. Locke!

MISS ROBINS' "TRACT"

April 13, 1907.

To be amused and touched, I constantly listen to the people who are preaching this and that in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoon. I cannot say that I ever come away with a sense that light has been let in on my darkness. I do not remember having heard from any of the holders-forth anything that was new without being nonsense, or true without being evident. But the odd stock of second-rate and second-hand and half-grasped ideas is usually set forth with skill. They are very fluent, these preachers, and have effective tricks of voice and gesture. They know their business; and it is because they not only know it but so obviously and whole-heartedly revel in it that I delight to stand under them. I am afraid they do not value my attendance; for I never interrupt them; and interruption is what they love most dearly. They have nimble wits, and can always trust themselves to score. Some of the interrupters, too, are well worth hearing. They have acquired in their own line almost as fine a technical skill as has the preacher in his. The duel is sometimes a long one; but it is always the preacher who vanquishes at last—partly, perhaps, because he looks down, while his antagonist looks up. See how his eyes gleam and his face glows as he resumes the thread of his discourse, lightly clutching, maybe, the lapels of his coat in the manner of one well-known statesman, or thumping his left palm with his right fist in the manner of another. If ever a man was happy, he is; and none was ever more vain than he. Young or old, native or alien, perched on a mere tub and minutely describing Heaven, or on a solid

little platform with "Clericalism: There Is The Enemy" emblazoned in gold on a mahogany lectern, he is irresistible; and the only bitterness in my Sunday cup of joy is that I cannot be in all the congregations simultaneously, so as to miss nothing, and that Sunday comes but once a week. "Votes for Women!" is being performed at the Court Theatre on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays; and thus, for the present, the intervals between Sunday and Sunday will not seem so long and barren to me. I shall attend every performance for the sake of the play's second act, which is a marvellously accurate reproduction of a thing equivalent to what I have been describing. The scene is laid in Trafalgar Square, and votes for women is the subject preached on; but the spirit, the tone of mind, the mannerisms, of the preachers are exactly those which I have studied near the Marble Arch. True, I have never heard any preacher so actually delightful as Miss Dorothy Minto; but she has caught exactly the spirit of her part—the blithe spirit of the budding platformist. She ought to be grateful to Miss Robins for a part so admirably written; and Miss Robins ought to be grateful to her for perfection. Perfect, too, is Mr. Edmund Gwenn. For sheer humour and vitality, in addition to its minute fidelity to the model, his presentment of Mr. Walker, a popular artisan-orator, is a real masterpiece in acting. Perfect is the rolling gait with which he passes to and fro along the steps of the column, with his hands thrust down in his pockets, and his chin thrust forward, and his face cocked to one side and shining all over with the good humour that comes of absolute belief in oneself, and of the consciousness that one is very magnetic—oh! I do assure you that Mr. Walker magnetised the whole audience across the footlights, to say nothing of the stage-crowd, whose very interruptions were a proof that he was able to make them do exactly as he wished. Again and again must I go to see Mr. Walker thriving on those interruptions. Miss Robins has studied the mind of the crowd

not less intently than the mind of the popular orator; and Mr. Granville Barker has so drilled the crowd that its reality is overwhelming enough to be almost inartistic. The second act is thus a joy from first to last; and I do wish it could be so extended at each end that there would be no time for performing the first act and the third. If in those two acts Miss Robins had painted, after the manner of Mr. Bernard Shaw, an impartial and comedic picture of the ladies and gentlemen who are actively for and against female suffrage, the whole play would have been capital.

Miss Robins shows in her presentment of certain minor characters that she can extract plenty of fun from the feminist movement. Unfortunately, however, she is not "out for" fun. She is an ardent suffragist herself; and also an actress. As a suffragist, she wants to preach; and, as an actress, she wants to write thrilling parts, and to create thrilling situations. I don't mind being preached at, and I love being thrilled. But it does not follow that because an actress in her own person can thrill one (as Miss Robins, in plays written by other people, has often thrilled me) she can thrill one as a dramatist. Nor is a suffragist necessarily convincing by reason of her ardour. Indeed, her very ardour may be a stumbling-block to her, tripping up her determination to present her case with that firm cool grasp of logic, that rigid sense of justice, that good-humour, and that power of envisaging without personal bias every side of a question, which are among the prime glories of the daughters of Eve. Neither as dramatist does Miss Robins thrill me, nor as evangelist does she win me. I could hardly suppress a yawn when Mr. Geoffrey Stoner, the strong man of the Tory party, blenched and was for a moment transfixed at sight of Miss Vida Levering, of whom we already knew that ten years ago she ought to have been, but was not, married to some gentleman unknown. And I yawned outright when Stoner's fiancée, Miss Dunbarton, just be-

fore the curtain fell, learned through Stoner's knowledge of the name embroidered on a handkerchief that he had known Miss Levering in the past. In Trafalgar Square all was well. True, Miss Levering was on the steps of Nelson's Column, and Stoner and his fiancée were in the crowd; but the Court Theatre is not Drury Lane, and the principal persons of the play are not permitted to discuss their secrets loudly outside their own drawing-rooms. Miss Levering, therefore, had to content herself with turning faint at the sight of Stoner in the midst of her indiscreetly modest confession that it would be a bad day for England if all women thought as she did of all men. My heart sank when, the curtain rising on a drawing-room in Eaton Square, I knew Stoner was about to be taxed with his guilt by Miss Dunbarton. Stoner cut an even poorer figure than I had expected. Surely, even in this distressing situation, the strong man of the Tory party would not so utterly lose his debating instinct as Stoner does. He would not think (until his fiancée scornfully undeceived him) that he was making a good point in declaring that he had practically forgotten the other lady's existence. He would not—let us, at least, for the Tory party's sake, hope he would not—be there merely to be trampled on and turned inside out by woman's superior intellect and eloquence; nor surely would he presently be driven, lamb-like, to offer marriage to a lady who had been his mistress ten years ago and had left him suddenly without giving him her address and had taken all possible pains to avoid him ever since. You see, Miss Robins does not make the strong man of the Tory party a villain: only weak, weak as in the time when he shrank from marrying against his father's will. The scorn with which Miss Levering rejects his offer I may safely leave to your imagination: you will have already foreseen it. What I defy you to have foreseen is this: Stoner, who has always scoffed at the suffragist movement, announcing his conversion to it, and vowing active and eternal

fidelity to it, for no better reason than that he had once lived with a lady who ran away from him. Stay, there *is* another reason. Stoner's secretary has already informed his that the official wire-pullers anticipate the defeat of the party at the forthcoming elections unless Stoner "can manufacture some political dynamite". But Miss Robins lays no great stress on that bolstering reason. Indeed, I think she inserted the secretary's news not because she thought that philosophically a bolster was needed, but in order to give a tinge of opportunism to Stoner's conversion and thus get in an extra dig at male politicians in general. It was not enough that Stoner should do the right thing: Stoner must do it in the wrong way. Poor Stoner! I wonder whether any one of even our least gifted statesmen resembles him. Opportunistic, more or less, all statesmen are, and must be. But is any one of them so foolish as to be moved to turn a somersault over a great national problem by the reminder of a personal experience which has not the slightest bearing on the case? "I was seduced. I had not the vote. Therefore all women ought to have the vote" is a syllogism that evidently commends itself to Miss Levering, whom we must, therefore, alas, regret as a type of that incapacity for clear and impersonal thinking which some brutes have supposed to be characteristic of all women. Strange that Miss Robins, one of the cleverest of her sex, evidently takes Miss Levering quite seriously, presenting her not as the butt of a satirical comedy, but as the triumphant preacher in a didactic play! Is it possible that Miss Robins originally intended to make her play a satirical comedy? In that case, Stoner's offer of marriage, and his conversion to the cause, would —though still perhaps too farcically improbable for comedy— have been valuable, as helping to point the satire on the suffragists' argument that without the vote they can have no real influence. It is hard to believe that Miss Robins did not see that by making her two heroines so overwhelmingly influen-

tial she gave her whole case away. I think she *must* have treacherously intended to write a satirical comedy, and then have decided that a "tract", written apparently by a sympathiser with the cause, would be a deadlier mode of attack: suffragists might say of a clever satirical comedy that no man could have done it so well; whereas the "tract" designed by Miss Robins would be taken by anti-suffragists as an instance of women's incapacity for dealing seriously with public questions. I will not, by taking her play at its surface-value, give Miss Robins the chance of laughing at me as she must have laughed at the shrill suffragistic cheers which punctuated the first performance. I recognise on her shoulders the mantle of the late Mrs. Lynn Linton, a campaigner not less strenuous than she, but less subtle, less formidable.

MR. HAWTREY'S NEW BIRTH

May 4, 1907.

No shock is more severe than the shock of seeing naked a face hirsute hitherto. The edifice of our knowledge of the man, knowledge which had seemed to be so stable, comes crumbling and crashing down about our ears. Always the fancy on which it had been founded is spiflicated by the fact. The chin that we had supposed to be so square, so strong, with a deep cleft in the middle, lo! tapers and recedes. Or the chin we had thought so pathetically weak is a replica of Napoleon's. The mouth of whose amiability and sensitiveness we had never harboured a doubt appears as the fissure in a rock. Or the mouth that we had imagined villainous is all a-quiver with good will. If the upper lip was evidently short, it is long; if long, short. Always the actuality turns our preconception inside out. We feel as though the whole face of nature had been changed; and we are appalled by the wanton daring of the man who has done the deed. Especially does the transformation appal us when the hair that has been shorn had a peculiar and striking quality of its own. I am sure that if the German Emperor, acting on one of his sudden impulses, shaved his moustache, the balance of Europe would be upset utterly. The fame of Mr. Charles Hawtrey is not, nor was his moustache, on so grand a scale as the Kaiser's. His fame is bounded by the silver sea. And his moustache was trimmed to a quite ordinary proportion and direction. But its very lack of obtrusiveness, its quiet, agreeable correctness, its urbanity and mundanity, its smoothness and silkiness, made it more than a mere appen-

dage, made it an integral part of Mr. Hawtrey, made it a symbol of Hawtreyismus. And now it is gone. Have the hairs frizzled to nothingness in a barber's bonfire? Or were they rescued from annihilation by Mr. Clarkson, to be carefully reconstituted on a background of crêpe and presented to the nation? The nation demands an answer to these questions, or rather *will* demand the answer so soon as it recovers the breath which the sudden apocalypse of Mr. Hawtrey's whole face has taken away from it.

Meanwhile, there is one factor that somewhat relaxes the awful strain of the situation. Usually, when a man has shaved the hair from his face, our embarrassment is equalled, and reacted on, by his own. He is a walking apology for not having asked our permission. He is a walking entreaty that we will avert our eyes. His behaviour is that of a leper. Not so Mr. Hawtrey's. At the cue for his entrance, he bursts upon the scene with the radiance of a man released from life-long servitude. Such a mood, understand, has nothing to do with the part of John March, Merchant Adventurer of London and Boston, A.D. 1773. On the contrary, the minor characters of the play have prepared us to see John March "in one of his black moods". Imagine Mr. Hawtrey in a black mood! Imagine a man who for twenty-five years or so has been compelled to impersonate invariably his own amenable, sleek, quiet, fresh, sly, engaging self in his own perfect coats and trousers, suddenly happening on the chance of impersonating a morose New Englander of the eighteenth century! The sensation of being actually born again could not, I fancy, be more bracing and exhilarating. If ever a man was beaming with happiness, Mr. Hawtrey was thus beaming when he made his entry. These obvious radiations somewhat marred his presentment of John March's black mood. But they helped to tide the audience over its agony at the physical transformation—a transformation

which may be for better or worse: the time has not yet come when we can calmly adjudicate that point: we only know that the transformation is complete and crushing. Towards the end of the first act Mr. Hawtrey's joy in having something new to do ceased to interfere with his power to do it satisfactorily; for it was then that a beauteous maiden arrived from the old world—a maiden whom grim John March was to love at first sight, very rapturously. (Never shall I forget the unction with which Mr. Hawtrey, offering refreshment to the maiden, pronounced "China tea" as "Chayny tay".) In the second act, too, for a time, all went well. One of the minor characters primed us with the knowledge that John March was walking up and down the adjacent room and seeming "sort of inspired". And anon we saw Mr. Hawtrey composing love-verses in the most convincing manner. But later his own private high-spirits began to get in his way again. The course of true love was not running smooth. John March believed that Miss Perceval loved another. And here, alas, Mr. Hawtrey found himself unable to purvey the requisite chagrin. But when the warrior awoke in John March, impelling him to hurl defiance at the minions of King George, then Mr. Hawtrey left nothing to be desired: no war-horse ever said "Ha, ha" with more ebullient gusto. And of course the love story had a happy ending, so that Mr. Hawtrey came off with flying colours at the last.

A REVIVAL OF "PRUNELLA"

May 11, 1907.

"Prunella" does not wither. It is as delicately fresh a thing as ever. In despite of its fragility, it is one of the most "important" of modern English plays; for it is the most spontaneously poetic. It owes nothing to the tradition of poetic drama. It is a perfectly natural product of the time we live in. It comes not of a laudable determination to handle grand passions in the grand manner, but of an impulse to express something that was in the hearts of the authors—a wistful and melancholy little something, belonging to a time in which people, for all their outward strenuousness, are so frail, and so sick at heart. The something that the authors had to express was rather an emotion than an idea. There is nothing modern in the idea that youth wanes, and passion fades, and pleasure palls, and after the spring comes the autumn. What is modern is the sense that after all it doesn't much matter, alas, and can't, alas, be taken quite seriously. That is the sense which pervades "Prunella". We feel that in the character of Pierrot the authors have dramatised themselves, and us. Often as Pierrot has been presented on the stage, never, I think, has his nature been shown so thoroughly. However, it is not for its significance that "Prunella" is most highly to be valued, but rather for the mere story of it. The play is a succession of deliciously well invented scenes; and I know not which of these is the best. Prunella repeating her lessons in the prim garden, and hearing the distant sounds of the mummers' music; the coloured ribands thrown into the garden over the yew hedge, and the flight of Prunella's aunts

into the house; and Prunella's own flight into the house after Pierrot has kissed her; Pierrot lounging in the moonlight while the baritone of his troupe sings the serenade for him to Prunella's window, and then taking the guitar and striking a right attitude before the shutters shall be parted; smug Scaramel holding the ladder down which Prunella is carried in Pierrot's arms; Prunella's bewilderment while the troupe of Pierrot dances round her, pelting her with roses and urging her out to life; and the terminal statue that utters words to her and makes music with its stone fiddle; and the old gardeners, roused from their sleep, coming to find the garden empty and the statue still fiddling; later, when it is autumn, Pierrot wandering into the garden, not remembering it—Pierrot all in black, with his followers all querulous, dishevelled, lame, but still trying to affect mirth; Pierrot recognising the window, and then remembering Prunella, and calling for moonlight and song, and bidding Scaramel prop up the ladder—all in vain; the homecoming of Prunella, and her meeting with Pierrot, and the way in which . . . no; the way in which Pierrot is converted from himself, and the play ends, seems to me the one fault in the play's scheme. It is a pretty notion that Pierrot should really love Prunella, and should prove his love by daring to touch her after she has told him that she is a phantom, and that if he touches her he too will die. But it is not a notion in key with the rest of the play. It is a dodge for securing a happy ending at the expense of truth to Pierrot's character. Either Prunella ought to be actually a phantom, and Pierrot to consent to touch her simply because he has lost even the melancholy joy that he once had in life, and because he is rather inquisitive of death; or Prunella ought to die in Pierrot's arms, and he to take a certain pleasure in the completeness of the romance, and in the arrangements for a prettily sombre funeral. There is for "Prunella" no possibility of a happy ending that shall be logical

and congruous. The ending made by Mr. Laurence Housman and Mr. Granville Barker is not really a happy one; for we are sure that Pierrot, in his heart, was rather disappointed when, after touching Prunella, he found himself alive with a living girl in his arms. However, the play is in itself too exquisite a thing to be utterly marred for us by a wrong conclusion.

It is also too exquisite a thing to be utterly marred by faults of production. Nevertheless, the faults are annoying. The play is a fantasy, and, as such, should have a fantastic setting. The façade of the house in which Prunella lives is much too realistic. We ought not to be reminded of an actual little Georgian house of red brick. We ought to be given a symbol, a conventionalised synthesis, of all such houses. The cypress trees beyond the hedge ought to represent not actual, but ideal, cypresses. The hedge itself at the Court Theatre is less open to objection, because it is evidently a symbol for a hedge; but it is not a beautiful or ingenious symbol. It is a pity that Mr. Gordon Craig is not in England. He could have designed a setting lovely in itself and exactly in accord to the play's spirit. Mr. Charles Ricketts would also have laid us under obligations—for I suppose he would have stifled his first impulse to erect a tent over the Dutch garden. In default of him, why did not Mr. Housman himself design the scene? He has every qualification. And what a chance for his fancy to run riot in designing the costumes for Pierrot's revellers! The actual costumes, though bright in colour, are lamentably dull in conception. And the ballet which the revellers dance around Prunella at the play's crisis—a ballet that ought to have been weirdly delirious, after the fashion of the Brocken—is composed of the tritest and tamest figures imaginable. As a producer of realistic modern plays Mr. Granville Barker has no peer. But (if, as I suppose, he supervised the production of "Prunella") he is embarrassed by plays of fantasy (even when it is partly from his own brain that the

fantasy has forthcome). Not as an actor is he thus embarrassed. His impersonation of Pierrot was flawlessly good, and our memory of it makes doubly hard the task of Mr. Graham Browne, who plays Pierrot in this revival. Evidently Mr. Graham Browne knows just how the part ought to be played; and he is helped, to a certain extent, by that quality of romanticism which often peeps out from his impersonations of quite prosaic parts. A romantic Pierrot is more than could be achieved by most of our younger actors. But a fantastic Pierrot is more than can be achieved by Mr. Graham Browne. He pirouettes and poses, but conscientiously. We feel all the time that Pierrot is a sterling person who for some reason—some reason which is, we are sure, a good one—has chosen to assume, for a while, an eccentric demeanour. In the last scene of the play—just when, as I have indicated, Pierrot ceases to be Pierrot—Mr. Graham Browne leaves nothing to be desired. At all other times his sentiment is much too full-blooded, much too sincere. As Scaramel, Mr. James Hearn masters the failing that so often mars his performances: he manages not to over-act; and thus the very real fantasy of his conception of the part is most valuable to the general effect of the play. Prunella herself is played by Miss Dorothy Minto, who, among British ingénues, has no rival in the art of turning everything to favour and to prettiness. Some of our elder actresses would have got more than Miss Minto gets out of the pathetic scenes in the last act. But it is essential that Prunella should be in her 'teens. And Miss Minto's attempt at suggesting a broken heart is not such a poor attempt as to make us ungrateful for her perfection in the earlier scenes, where she is the child expectant and puzzled and happy.

READING PLAYS ALOUD

May 25, 1907.

Much art is needed in this matter. In my time, I have heard many plays read, both by authors and by actors, but have heard few read well. I have grown to dread these readings. My heart sinks when with a gleaming eye the actor, or with an apologetic eye the author, fingering the first of those too, too numerous neat crisp type-written pages, seeks to explain to me the exact position of the doors and windows, and the exact nature of the high-backed settee whereon a person seated would be perfectly visible to the audience, but not necessarily so to any one on the stage. I nod intelligently, however; and the reader, reassured, clears his throat, says "Well then!" and begins. For a little while my attention does not wander from the dialogue; but ere long I begin to compare the number of pages that have been turned with the number of pages that have *not* been turned, and to work out little sums in rule of three, with an eye on the clock. Disheartening little sums! I presently cancel them, and let my mind dwell on things in general. But all the while my face wears an expression of animated receptivity—at least, I think so and hope so—and my occasional murmurs and ejaculations, though automatic, are never inappropriate, being, indeed, of a kind that might mean anything. In the pauses between the acts I find that the epithet "Capital!", uttered repeatedly in different tones, carries me through quite well; but when, at the conclusion of the play, I am asked for my valuable opinion on this or that point, my ingenuity is put to a test which is sometimes a trifle too hard for it; and I think I have seen more than

once, in the course of my persistent declarations that I wouldn't have a word altered, a shade of suspicion come darkening the eyes of my questioner—suspicion which doubtless changes to certainty when the play, having been produced somewhere, is conscientiously slated in "The Saturday Review."

Once or twice (I hasten to say in self-defence) the difference between my oral and my written opinion has not been due to inattention. Once or twice I have heard a play really well read—read so well that I had to listen, and was enthralled, and had a genuine conviction that all was well with the play itself. A really good reader can make a play seem much better than it is. But I do not fancy that more than a very few of the many bad plays produced owe their production to this fact. For to read a play really well is the rarest of accomplishments. The ordinary dramatist reads shockingly. In the self-consciousness induced by his own work, and by the knowledge that he has no histrionic power, he takes refuge in that monotonous sing-song with which a poet utters a sonnet. The ordinary actor fails for an opposite reason. He is too histrionic. He throws himself so vividly and so violently into the manners and emotions of the various characters that all illusion flies from us. He cannot help acting as though he were on the stage. As he is reading in a room, and is dressed all the while like an ordinary citizen (or more or less like one) and not in an ever-changing sequence of costumes appropriate to the various persons of the play, his lack of restraint is quite fatal to his purpose. I well remember the reading of a play by a very virile old actor who assumed, whenever he was impersonating the heroine, a high falsetto voice. It is one of the few occasions on which I have found myself compelled to listen. Unfortunately the play was of a tragic character, so that the pent-up mirth which at last irresistibly burst forth, and would not cease till sheer exhaustion silenced

me, caused rather grave offence to an artist for whom I had a profound respect.

Of course, that falsetto voice is an extreme instance; but the question is only of degree. More or less of absurdity is inevitable when the reader of a play forgets the difference between a room and a stage, and between himself and a "cast" in costume. His aim, which should be to make *us* forget that difference, can be achieved only by striking a mean between the inexpressiveness of the reader who is not an actor and the complete expressiveness to which an actor is naturally tempted. In a word, he must work by *suggestion*. There must be no violent changes of voice or face or manner. The characters and their doings must, if they are to illude us, be but indicated.

A PUBLISHED PLAY

August 17, 1907.

I HAVE just been reading Mr. Clyde Fitch's comedy, "The Truth", as issued by the Macmillans. I did not see it when it was first produced at the Comedy Theatre, but did see it, by social accident, some weeks later. I enjoyed it immensely. But afterwards, in cold blood, I wondered how much of my enjoyment might have been due to the fact that I had seen the play with no purpose of writing about it. For one who is accustomed to write about plays there must ever be a subtle alchemy in a play about which he is going to write nothing. He is like to mistake his joy of holiday for joy in a masterpiece of dramatic art. Strictly, he never does enjoy a play which he has to analyse. He may take a certain pleasure in the exercise of his faculties; but such pleasure is independent of the quality of his subject: his perception of faults is as pleasing to him as his perception of merits. He cannot surrender himself, as you can, to the story that the dramatist tells. He has to regard the story as a work of art, all the time, and is thus precluded from the rapture of illusion. This is unfortunate not only for him but also for his work. The best kind of criticism is, like poetry, "emotion remembered in tranquillity". A critic of the static arts, sculpture and painting, can purvey that kind of criticism. He goes to a gallery, happens on a masterpiece, drinks it in with his eyes, waves his arms about it, goes down on his knees to thank heaven for it, and presently rises and takes from his pocket his microscope and note-book. The masterpiece is still there, before his eyes. Had he not known that it would be so, he could not

have afforded to indulge in those wholesome ecstasies. Them the dramatic critic must forgo because so soon as the curtain has fallen he is cut off from communion with the object of his criticism, and cannot investigate that object "as in itself it is". He might, of course, solve the difficulty by going to every play on the second as well as on the first night. But do not, I beg you, force this counsel of perfection on a class of men whose life is already quite arduous enough. After all, masterpieces are few; and so not much harm is done, not much fine criticism is lost, through the present system.

That I have not enjoyed reading "The Truth" so much as I enjoyed seeing it acted may be partly due to the fact that I have read it with the purpose of writing about it. But still more do I blame a lack in myself. I have not enough theatrical imagination to be able to enjoy reading modern plays. True, I can enjoy reading Mr. Shaw's plays. But the pleasure I derive from them is exactly proportionate to the quantity of what is not strictly dramatic in them. It is the philosophic expositions of Mr. Shaw himself that I read there with delight. The characters seem to me unreal, and there seems to be no dramatic development of any kind. You may remember—I recently reminded you of—the terrific "howler" I made when "Man and Superman" was first published. I announced that the characters were lifeless, and that the play (delightful for reading) had no fitness whatsoever for the stage. This is but one of many instances in which I have been hopelessly at sea; and I have finally determined never again to utter an opinion about the dramatic value of a play which I have not seen enacted. For me plays are somewhat like those "transferables" with which one used to play as a child. You remember the large sheet of shiny paper, printed all over with vague grey blurs; and how, when you had cut out one of the blurs, and dipped it in water, and pressed it violently down on some hard surface, you were

rewarded with the sight of a bright yellow Swiss châlet on a yet brighter green mountain, or the Prince of Wales in scarlet and gold, or some other not less dazzling and inspiring apparition. One was never disappointed in a "transferable". It always came off, figuratively as well as literally. Plays do not, indeed, always come off thus. But they do resemble "transferables" in the sharpness with which their qualities (good or evil) appear when put to the test, and in the impossibility of knowing beforehand what those qualities will be. There have been periods when playwriting was an art which manifested itself as fully and pleasantly in books as in the theatre. But the present mode of playwriting is but to proffer certain choppy adumbrations, hints, vague and grey to all but the man who happens to possess in a high degree the gift of theatrical imagination. How rare that gift is we may gauge through the vast number of doomed plays produced by the theatrical managers, whose whole livelihood depends on their acquisition and cultivation of it. Thus I need not feel deeply humbled by not possessing it myself in a high degree. What worries me is that I am so destitute of it that even after I have seen a play performed I cannot, in reading that play, recapture aught of the emotion which it gave me. The close of the third act of "The Truth", for example, really moved me, in the theatre; but when I read "ROWLAND: Mrs. Warder's changed her mind. She's stopping here to-night. [*Putting his arms about her.*] BECKY: Father!"—why then my eyes are as dry as though I were studying a railway time-table. Implicitly, a railway time-table is as romantic a thing as could be; and there may be people who, studying it, feel themselves whirling through space, this way and that, in a wild confusion of innumerable anxious or joyous journeys. But Mr. Bradshaw is not explicitly a romantic writer. He does but hint, drily, abruptly, at possibilities. And that is just what the modern playwright does.

Except in the scene which I have mentioned, "The Truth" is, of course, sheer comedy; and comedy can be appreciated more easily than pathos through the medium of a printed play. But, even so, my smiles over the book of "The Truth" were few in comparison with the laughs I had emitted in the theatre. Mr. Fitch can write witty lines that are amusing to read; but, for the most part, his comedy is of the kind that needs utterance on the stage—utterance by this or that character at this or that moment. He is essentially a man of the theatre. Nor has any one ever denied that of him. The objection that English critics have usually made to his work is that he is so essentially a man of the theatre that he is unscrupulous about reality. Some of his plays certainly have justified that charge. But in all of them have been evident a vitality and gay resourcefulness that set him high above the ruck of ordinary playwrights. And now, in "The Truth", he has shown that he can depict life as conscientiously and as accurately as though he were not steeped in theatrical lore. Becky Warder, fibster and "allumeuse", but an admirable creature, is one of the best-observed and best-presented characters in modern drama. Mr. Fitch has been blamed for shifting the scene of his play, after the third act, from New York to Baltimore (London to Brighton, in the English version), and for thus eliminating certain subsidiary characters from the last two acts. Such an objection is merely pedantic. The change of venue matters nothing so long as the play preserves its character and the idea is consistently worked out. Perhaps the best scene in the play is in the last act, when the unhappy Becky, to win back the husband whom her fibs have alienated, adopts a stratagem suggested by the parent from whom she has inherited her talent for fibbing. And not less ironic is the happy ending—Becky and her husband both believing that she will never tell fibs again.

THE BALLET AT THE EMPIRE

October 5, 1907.

There is poetry in the idea of Covent Garden at dawn. That old piazza echoing with life and labour while all other places sleep! One likes to think of the freshness of the pearly and rosy dawn there—Aurora delighting, after the many square miles of chimney-pots she has just traversed, to linger in the fragrance of the multitudinous flowers and fruits that are heaped in that delicate oasis. One likes to think that she has never yet got quite used to Covent Garden—that it is always by way of being for her a fresh rapture. And therefore one gives Covent Garden at dawn a wide berth, and tries hard to forget the occasions on which one has actually seen it. The actuality is something awful. Was ever elsewhere so much bad language as hurtles continuously from end to end of the piazza, above the din of horses' hoofs on the cobbles? And the masses of roses with dew on them, where are they? You look vainly for a single blossom. What inspiration can you draw from cabbages? What message have potatoes for your soul? The cobbles are slippery with scraps of rejected vegetables, and you must walk warily lest you fall—warily, too, lest you be kicked by one of the terrified horses, or be mixed up in one of the innumerable brawls. And all the while you are shivering, for even at midsummer the English dawn bites shrewdly, and you probably catch a cold as souvenir of a visit which you would far rather not be reminded of. Why are you not in bed? You pick your way out of the intimidating chaos, and hail a hansom.

Well, it is not the mission of ballet to hold the mirror up to

nature. On the contrary, ballet's mission is to suppress and banish whatsoever in life does not pander to the senses, and to intensify by all possible devices the delightfulness of what is left over. In a ballet one looks to find embodied one's dream of an ideal state. On behalf of Mr. H. G. Wells I suggest to Mr. H. J. Hitchins that he should take Mr. Wells' "New Utopia" as the basis of the next ballet at the Empire. I do not feel that the world has thrilled with joy at Mr. Wells' vision of its future development. I myself was deeply depressed by that vision. But I fancy we might all be reconciled to it if it were presented to us in the form of a ballet, shimmering with the roseate hues which it evidently had for Mr. Wells' eyes. In his book the vision came out all drab; and thus, in this colour-loving world, the interval between us and the millennium is in no measure curtailed. Come, Mr. Hitchins: let a ballet pave the way to mankind's salvation. Mr. Wells might object to this procedure as savouring of trickery. But surely the end justifies the means. Even if the actual Utopia turns out to be a disappointment when it is established, just as an actual dawn at Covent Garden would be a blow to any one who had but seen it as depicted in the present ballet, mankind will not, with Mr. Wells' eye on it, dare revert to its ancient naughtiness. "The present ballet"? In my sociological ardour, I have strayed far from that. I was going to say how delightful it is to see the porters and costers of Covent Garden all turned to damsels, quite fresh and neat, smiling instead of frowning, all skipping and pirouetting in ordered ranks, while they pursue their Arcadian tasks, with never a curse on their pretty lips. The glow of dawn makes rosy the sky behind the chimney-pots, and yet there is no chill in the air around us. This is Covent Garden as it ought to be. Revellers, masked and unmasked, troop out from the Opera House, all of them gay, none of them haggard, all of them sober. Actual dawn in the piazza is especially unattractive when

there are actual revellers to mingle with it. The English character was not formed for masquerade. No English crowd is so preternaturally gloomy as that which you find at a masked ball; nor can it be said that those units who seek to drown awkwardness in alcohol succeed in diffusing an air of gaiety: noise is not gaiety; and the mirth of these units rings more than ever hollow when it is prolonged into the cold grey unbecoming dawn without. If only the real thing could be like the thing at the Empire! Behold the merry demure face of Mlle. Genée as she darts forth, at length, with fluttering hands and twinkling ankles, to meet the dawn. Surely she herself is the incarnation of dawn—the dawn that we read of in books, and dream of in bed with the curtains drawn to shut out the genuine article. It is mainly in virtue of this peculiar freshness in her that we set Mlle. Genée so far above all other dancers. Others are clever, but have not the cleverness to hide it, and impress us with a sense of their responsibility of their art. Mlle. Genée, for all the high formality of her steps, seems as artless as though she were but dancing for joy, with no one to look on. In a sense, indeed, she *is* spontaneous. So perfect is her mastery of her art that she can afford not to think of it in public, can afford to throw herself into the part she is playing. Alone among the dancers of this generation, she is an actress, and an actress so exquisite, so sensitive, that one might almost grudge her to ballet.

In ballet, one certainly grudges every moment when she is not on the stage. Mr. Hitchins has found an ingenious device for lulling us. He makes appeal to a sentiment almost as strong in us as our sentiment for Mlle. Genée: to wit, our sentiment for our own past. The greater part of the new ballet is devoted to reminiscences of old comic operas. "La Grande Duchesse", "Madame Favart", "La Fille de Madame Angot", are things too antique to touch me. I was in the nursery when Offenbach and

Lecocq were in their heyday; and their music stirs but faint chords of memory in my breast. But, looking around, I saw the heads of my elders wagging in unison, and a strange light in their eyes, half-joyous, half-sad, as the old tunes were played, and the old scenes enacted. Just such a light, doubtless, shone from my own eyes (and was noted half-enviously, half-pityingly, by my juniors) when the turn came for "Dorothy". With the first bars of the hunting song, a wild confusion of little vague memories surged up to me, and swept me back, unresisting, into adolescence. And then "You are Queen of my Heart To-night"! It was not Mr. Hayden Coffin whom this music conjured up, but a fellow-undergraduate who had hummed it, late one night, somewhat out of tune, on the terrace of an hotel in Lucerne. He had hummed it gazing up at a window on the third story, which he believed to be the bedroom-window of a young lady with whom he had fallen in love at first sight during table d'hôte. As he had not spoken to her, he hummed only under his breath; nor was he quite sure that the window was hers. The adventure was not, you perceive, an exciting one. But it had touched my imagination, and I give it as one of many memories that sprang gladly, sadly in me as I listened to the old tunes. "Véronique", the last of the items in the ballet, is too recent to make me sentimental: for me it is a comic opera, and no more. But we live in so rapid an age that I daresay some of my juniors will find in "Véronique" a reminder, bitter-sweet, of the time when they, too, were young.

AT HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

October 12, 1907.

"Jolly" is surely the right epithet for Mr. Oscar Asche's production of "As You Like It"; and I think one might, without risk of hyperbole, strengthen that epithet by the adverb "awfully". Yes, it is an awfully jolly affair, compact of good will and hard work and "go" and "snap" and "ginger". There is no shirking, no fumbling. Sharp's the word, and there isn't a dull moment. The whole thing is on a level with Mr. Asche's production of "The Taming of the Shrew". But that play is not, one must confess, on a level with "As You Like It". It is a capital farce, straightforward, full-blooded. But it is not, does not set out to be, a masterpiece of poetry. In "As You Like It" we have a delicate fantasy into which Shakespeare has breathed the very soul of spring. No other play is so fragrant, through and through, with young lyrical beauty. It is less like a play than like a lyric that has been miraculously prolonged to the length of a play without losing its airiness and its enchantment. If butterflies were gregarious, one would liken "As You Like It" to a swarm of butterflies all a-wing. I think it is rather a play for the reader's imagination than for the spectator's eyes and ears. What actual Rosalind, what actual Arden, could compete with the lady and the forest conjured up for us by the music of Shakespeare's words? Ah, let the butterflies hover in our imagination. Do not catch them for us. But, if catch them you will, be very tender with them. Rub off as little as you can of the bloom on their wings. As you are strong, be merciful.

Mr. Asche is strong, and I am sure he has meant to be merci-

ful. Arden, as shown under his auspices, is a very beautiful place. But it is not, like Shakespeare's Arden, an enchanted place. It is "a lovely spot". One feels that it is mentioned by Baedeker, and reproduced in colour on picture post-cards. I see the knickerbockered tourist buying a pack of these bright missives at the village shop, and sending them off right and left to his best friends, with stylographic inscriptions: "This is where I am", "Glorious weather", "What's the matter with Arden?" and the like. I think it a pity that Mr. Ricketts, who designed the scenery for "Attila", was not recalled to insinuate something of fantasy and mystery into the sterling naturalism of Mr. Harker's work. To explain why I think so, let me submit an hypothesis. You are a young man, desperately in love with a young woman. Circumstances force you to betake yourself to a forest. There you meet the young woman in a suit of masculine clothes. But you have not the faintest suspicion that it is she. You take her for a sympathetic gentleman, and confide to her the sorrow that is at your heart. You see her quite often, but never with an inkling of her identity. What think you of the hypothesis? You say it is a ludicrous one. Just so; and not less ludicrous seems the story of Rosalind and Orlando when it is enacted against a background that challenges, and successfully challenges, stark reality. Rosalind, we then feel, ought to be wearing a false beard and blue spectacles, and to be assuming a deep bass voice, in order to make the play verisimilar. Things have come to a pretty pass when we bother our heads about verisimilitude for such a dream as "As You Like It". As I have suggested, not the greatest genius in design could give us an Arden so good as the Arden dimly conceived by us when we read the play. But it would not be difficult to get an Arden better than Mr. Harker's. I am not one of those who think that the only possible backgrounds to poetic plays are of the highly-conventionalised type inaugurated by Mr. Craig and

adapted by Mr. Ricketts. But assuredly Nature must not be slavishly reproduced, as by Mr. Harker it is.

Again, I am not one of those who would have dramatic expression, in poetic plays, utterly subordinated to the rhythm of the verse. I do not ask for monotonous chanting. But I think it essential that the rhythm of the verse should be recognisably preserved for us. And this can be done without any sacrifice of the verse's meaning. The greater part of "As You Like It" is in prose; and Shakespeare's prose has a rhythm as important, in its way, as the rhythm of his verse. To neither of these rhythms is enough importance attached by the players in "As You Like It". Perhaps if they were not munching apples quite so assiduously, the verse and the prose would stand a better chance. According to the modern doctor, apples are a splendidly wholesome diet, and I should not like the players to risk their health by abstaining. But I suggest that two-thirds or so of the fruit consumed on the stage might with advantage be consumed in the dressing-rooms. No doubt it is very natural that Jaques, for example, should be engaged on an apple while he describes the seven ages of man. No doubt the thoughts in that speech are not so profound that their thinker would have had to postpone his meal because of them. But I maintain that the speech is a beautifully written one, very vivid, quaint, and offering scope for great variety in enunciation. It ought to be given for all it is worth, and not in a series of grunts between mouthfuls. Was not Mr. Asche playing Frederick, some years ago, in the Benson company when Mr. Lyall Swete, as Jaques, enunciated the speech so tellingly? I have not forgotten Mr. Swete's performance, and I wonder that Mr. Asche can have managed to put it so completely out of his mind. Mr. Swete's personality was, of course, not incongruous with that of "Monsieur Melancholy"; and Mr. Asche's decidedly is. However sympathetically Mr. Asche might enter into the character, Nature

would prevent him from seeming very like Jaques. Still he need not seem so utterly dissimilar as he does. He has a natural dignity, dignity unlike that of Jaques, but still dignity. Why should he so carefully discard it throughout the play, to substitute the manner of a "boer carousing"? Mr. Ainley, as Orlando, is not undignified, but he seems thoroughly afraid of the beauty of his part. He avoids lyric rapture as though it were the plague. There is no nonsense about "the quotidian of love upon" *him*. One would say that his occupation in the forest was not to "hang odes on hawthornes and elegies on brambles", but to find some fellow to challenge his catch-as-catch-can championship. It is very natural that a handsome actor, who sailed into fame as Paolo, should be anxious to escape the snares of sugariness and mawkishness into which handsome actors are apt to slip. And it is quite true that Orlando was a manly person. But Orlando was very much in love, lyrically so. And so long as Mr. Ainley eschews lyric rapture, he will not be Orlando. Miss Lily Brayton, as Rosalind, pays more attention than any one else (except Mr. Brydone, as Adam) to the cadences of the verse and prose; and gives a very clever, mettlesome performance, somewhat lacking in softness. Mr. Courtice Pounds is amusingly unctuous, yet light, as Touchstone. And I suppose that if I were an Elizabethan in the cock-pit, Miss Caldwell's Audrey would keep me in fits of laughter. Being what I am, I wish she would tone her performance down: it is very much too wantonly ugly. Audrey was a slut, but a slut of the woodland, not of the gin-palace. Mr. Brydone plays Adam with real imagination, pathos, and sense of beauty.

MR. VEDRENNE

October 26, 1907.

I do not remember exactly how many years ago, and at which of the suburban theatres, "The Devil's Disciple" was produced by Mr. Murray Carson. But I have clear recollection of a very happy evening—of two such evenings, indeed, for I could not resist a second visit. And last Tuesday evening I saw the same play at the Savoy Theatre. Yet I am not impatient to see it again. What is wrong with me? I am not blasé. Nor has the play grown old-fashioned. Reading it, I find it as fresh as ever —as witty a comedy, as vigorous a melodrama, as wayward and jolly an ebullition of Mr. Shaw's peculiar genius. Seeing it, I nearly slept. Mr. Granville Barker is the very last person of whom I should wish to speak lightly. I have a very keen admiration for him as playwright, and am at this moment angry at the prospect of not seeing "Waste" acted, and am disgusted by the wretched exhibition which nearly all the other managers have just been making of themselves in regard to the censorship. As a stage-manager and "producer" of modern plays, Mr. Barker has, in my eyes, no rival. At the Court Theatre, he laid me under a long series of obligations, which I shall never forget. How perfectly those plays were cast, and how well the mimes were made to act in unison! How meticulously were all the flats "jined", so that we were never conscious of the stage-management, and had only the smooth illusion of life! I find myself distracted between my sense of the fact that the production of "The Devil's Disciple" is a thoroughly bad one and my distaste for decrying anything done by Mr. Barker.

Luckily, Mr. Barker has, like Mr. Spenlow, a partner. Yes, hurrah, I am convinced that "The Devil's Disciple" was cast and stage-managed by Mr. Vedrenne alone.

The worst fault of the production is its general effect of dulness and lassitude; and this effect is undoubtedly due to the funereal and appalling slowness with which the author's words are delivered. English audiences may not be very quick-witted; but the meanings of dialogue can be caught well enough by us if they are expressively delivered. We do not need a snail's pace in delivery. On the contrary, it does but cause our attention to wander. The mimes in "The Devil's Disciple" are of various ages and schools, and they act in various keys, with no effect of unity except in this one particular: they have all agreed to emulate the snail. Mr. Matheson Lang plays Richard Dudgeon, and is the one person in the cast who has been rightly selected, and who seems to enter into the spirit of his part. His performance is virile and intellectual, and he gives us the very man that Dick Dudgeon was, in every detail, except the all-important detail of pace. He talks as deliberately as his colleagues, and thus gives the impression of a judicial slowness which cannot be reconciled with recklessness and dare-devilry. Anthony Anderson, the parson, is a thoroughly live character, and as such was played, in Mr. Carson's production, by Mr. Macklin. Mr. Rann Kennedy reduces him to the level of a dull melodramatic automaton. Stagey, too, is Miss Bateman as Mrs. Dudgeon. Doubtless, Mrs. Dudgeon was a frightening person, but her way of being terrific was not Sarah Siddons' way, not the way of Miss Bateman, who seems to be ever clutching the dagger in one hand and the bowl in the other. Miss Bateman is a fine actress in high tragedy, but "The Devil's Disciple" is not pitched in that key. Of course, no amount of suasion from Mr. Vedrenne during rehearsals could have appreciably altered Miss Bateman's inveterate method. But Mr.

Vedrenne could, at least, have saved this distinguished actress from making havoc of her exit at the end of the first act. "My curse on you! My dying curse!" says Mrs. Dudgeon to her son, "with her hand on her heart", according to the stage directions, "as if she had received her deathblow". Miss Bateman delivers this speech, not as the parting shot of hatred and mean disappointment, but as the heart-cry of a sweet, gentle, tortured lady who is nigh unto the valley of the shadow. She makes, in fact, a direct appeal for sympathy—a little sympathy to reward her for all the trouble she has been taking to make our blood run cold. And she gets the sympathy, right enough. This absurdity is all the more damaging to the play's balance because, when Dick retorts "It will bring me luck. Ha, ha, ha!" we see in him a monster of filial iniquity. Decidedly, Mr. Vedrenne should have put his foot down. I did not notice any point at which he could have improved Miss Wynne Matthison's playing of Judith Anderson. He could not have made her harmonise with the high tragedy of Miss Bateman, or with the conventional melodrama of Mr. Kennedy, or (such is the gallimaufry of manners) with the farcical clowning provided by certain other members of the cast. Miss Wynne Matthison is a wholly modern actress, and may be trusted never to force the note. The only trouble with her is that she cannot be trusted to strike the note. Judith Anderson is a highly emotional person, and that is just the kind of person whom Miss Wynne Matthison cannot suggest to us, and could not suggest to us if she were coached to eternity by a far more experienced stage-manager than Mr. Vedrenne. Chance after fine chance of implicit or explicit emotion she lets slip, throughout the play; and her evident earnestness, our knowledge that she is doing her best not ungracefully, is scant solace for Mr. Vedrenne's initial error in casting her for the part. I daresay that Miss Marjorie Day, who plays the part of the frightened child,

Essie, is also doing her best, according to her lights. But these lights are dim. It was Mr. Vedrenne's business to illuminate the young lady. Essie is Cinderella translated into terms of reality; and Miss Day translates her industriously back into terms of Christmas pantomime. Her performance is well symbolised by her clothes—or rather by her costume. Essie was in rags. Miss Day wears a neat costume of brand-new bright brown cloth, with scollops round the hem to suggest abjection, in the traditional manner. And, when she comes on an errand to the parson's house, the prettiness of the confection is coquettishly accentuated by a cap of scarlet silk, so that she looks just as though she were going to a fancy-dress ball as Esmeralda. Surely Mr. Vedrenne, by the exercise of a little tact combined with firmness, might have prevented this charming spectacle. He could not have instilled into Mr. James Annand, as Christopher Dudgeon, that talent for imaginative comedy which delighted me in Mr. Wills' performance of the part. But he might have curbed the excesses in which Mr. Annand indulges at inopportune moments, distracting the audience with violent by-play when important scenes are being enacted in the centre of the stage. To suppress that kind of zeal is surely one of the first, simplest, and most sacred duties of a stage-manager. Mr. Kenyon Musgrave, as the Sergeant, is another instance of Mr. Vedrenne's good-natured willingness to let mimes run wild in vengeance for having been cast for small parts. The Sergeant has no business to roll his eyes and inflate his paunch comically when he calls for silence in the court-room. The scene is in itself an intensely amusing one, and needs no foisting-in of crude funniments. Major Swindon is quite a real character, a brave and well-meaning gentleman, ridiculous only because he is stupid. Mr. Arnold Lucy's comic make-up and comic voice are quite inappropriate, therefore, and do much to mar the intrinsic fun of the part. Mr. Vedrenne seeks to undo by his

acting what he omitted to undo as stage-manager. By playing General Burgoyne in the faintest, saddest of minor keys, he seeks to redress the balance displaced by Mr. Lucy as the Major. I am aware that in the programme Mr. Barker is named as playing General Burgoyne; and, as an odd coincidence with this printer's error, Mr. Vedrenne's make-up and voice are such as might almost lead one to mistake him for Mr. Barker, who, of course, would never have dreamed of accepting a part so distinctly outside the range of his own talent. General Burgoyne was a dashing soldier, with a wit nourished on generous potations of port. He was not the chaplain of his own regiment, as we should, if Mr. Vedrenne's interpretation were all we had to go on, probably presume him to have been. I have an ineffaceable memory of Mr. Luigi Lablache's interpretation. What fulness, what elegant variety of lightness, was there! I remember the picture he conjured up, and the roar of laughter he won, when he spoke of "my friend Swindon in a black cap". There was no picture, no laugh, when Mr. Vedrenne enunciated the words in the course of his plaintive monotone. There was no laugh, there seemed to be no point, when the General, inviting Dick to lunch after the scaffold scene, said "Bring Mrs. Anderson, if she will be so good." The plaintive monotone was fatal, throughout, to one of the most delicious parts ever written in comedy. I have sometimes heard Mr. Granville Barker let his voice degenerate into just such a monotone (though usually he is alert and various). It is evidently from him that Mr. Vedrenne has caught the trick. I do urge Mr. Vedrenne to abandon it.

"SARAH'S" MEMOIRS *

December 7, 1907.

I WISH I had read this book before I left London. In a very small and simple village on the coast of Italy I find it over-exciting. Gray and gentle are the olive-trees around me; and the Mediterranean mildly laps the shore, with never a puff of wind for the fishermen, whose mothers and wives and daughters sit plying their bobbins all day long in the shade of the piazza. In mellow undertones they are gossiping, these women at their work, all day long, and day after day. Gossiping of what, in this place where nothing perceptibly happens? The stranger here loses his sense of life. A trance softly envelops him. Imagine a somnambulist awaking to find himself peering down into the crater of a volcano, and you will realise how startling Mme. Sarah Bernhardt's book has been to me.

Hers is a volcanic nature, as we know, and hers has been a volcanic career; and nothing of this volcanicism is lost in her description of it. It has been doubted whether she really wrote the book herself. The vividness of the narration, the sure sense of what was worth telling and what was not, the sharp, salt vivacity of the style (which not even the slip-shod English of the translator can obscure)—all these virtues have to some pedants seemed incompatible with authenticity. I admit that it is disquieting to find an amateur plunging triumphantly into an art which we others, having laboriously graduated in it, like to regard as a close concern of our own. When Sarah threw her energies into the art of sculpture, and acquitted herself very

* Memoirs of Sarah Bernhardt. London: Heinemann. 1907.

well, the professional sculptors were very much surprised and vexed. A similar disquiet was produced by her paintings. Let writers console themselves with the reflection that to Sarah all things are possible. There is no use in pretending that she did not write this book herself. Paris contains, of course, many accomplished hacks who would gladly have done the job for her, and would have done it quite nicely. But none of them could have imparted to the book the peculiar fire and salt that it has—the rushing spontaneity that stamps it, for every discriminating reader, as Sarah's own.

Her life may be said to have been an almost unbroken series of "scenes" from the moment when, at the age of three, she fell into the fire. "The screams of my foster-father, who could not move, brought in some neighbours. I was thrown, all smoking, into a large pail of fresh milk. . . . I have been told since that nothing was so painful to witness and yet so charming as my mother's despair." The average little girl would not resent being removed from a boarding school by an aunt. She would not "roll about on the ground, uttering the most heart-rending cries". But that is what little Sarah did; and "the struggle lasted two hours, and while I was being dressed I escaped twice into the garden and attempted to climb the trees and to throw myself into the pond. . . . I was so feverish that my life was said to be in danger". On another occasion she swallowed the contents of a large ink-pot, after her mother had made her take some medicine; and "I cried to mamma, 'It is you who have killed me!' " The desire for death—death as a means of scoring off some one, or as an emotional experience —was frequent both in her childhood and in her maturity. When she was appearing as "Zaïre", M. Perrin, her manager, offended her in some way, and she was "determined to faint, determined to vomit blood, determined to die, in order to enrage Perrin". An old governess, Mlle. de Brabender, lay dying,

and "her face lighted up at the supreme moment with such a holy look that I suddenly longed to die". Fainting was the next best thing to dying, and Sarah, throughout her early career, was continually fainting, with or without provocation. It is a wonder that so much emotional energy as she had to express in swoons, in floods of tears, in torrents of invective, did not utterly wear out her very frail body. Somehow her body fed and thrived on her spirit. The tragedian in her cured the invalid. Doubtless, if she had not been by nature a tragedian, and if all her outbursts of emotion had come straight from her human heart, she could not have survived. It is clear that even in her most terrific moments one half of her soul was in the position of spectator, applauding vigorously. This artistic detachment is curiously illustrated by the tone she takes about herself throughout her memoirs. The test of a good autobiography is the writer's power to envisage himself. Sarah envisages herself ever with perfect clearness and composure. She does not, in retrospect, applaud herself except when applause is deserved. She is never tired of laughing at herself with the utmost good humour, or of scolding herself with exemplary sternness. Of her sudden dash into Spain she says: "I had got it into my head that my Fate willed it, that I must obey my star, and a hundred other ideas, each one more foolish than the other." And such criticisms abound throughout the volume. It is very seldom that her sense of humour fails her, very seldom that she does not see herself from without as clearly as from within. She seems surprised that people were surprised at her sleeping in a coffin; and it still seems strange to her that a menagerie in a back-garden of Chester Square should excite unfavourable comment. Of this menagerie she gives an engaging description. "The cheetah, beside himself with joy, sprang like a tiger out of his cage, wild with liberty. He rushed at the trees and made straight for the dogs, who all four began to howl with terror.

The parrot was excited, and uttered shrill cries; and the monkey, shaking his cage about, gnashed his teeth to distraction." Sarah's "uncontrollable laughter", mingled with that of Gustave Doré and other visitors, strengthened the symphony. M. Got called next day to remind Sarah of the dignity of the Comédie Française; whereupon she again had the cheetah released, with not less delectable results. Can we wonder that there were comments in the newspapers of both nations? Sarah can. "Injustice has always roused me to revolt, and injustice was certainly having its fling. I could not," says she, "do a thing that was not watched and blamed."

Now and again she pauses in her narrative to make remarks at large—to develop some theory of artistic criticism, or to handle some large social problem. And in these disquisitions she is always delightfully herself. She is a shrewd and trenchant critic of art, and in her ideas about humanity she is ever radiantly on the side of the angels, radiant with a love of mercy and a hatred of oppression. Capital punishment she abominates as "a relic of cowardly barbarism". "Every human being has a moment when his heart is easily touched, when the tears of grief will flow; and those tears may fecundate a generous thought which might lead to repentance. I would not for the whole world be one of those who condemn a man to death. And yet many of them are good, upright men, who when they return to their families are affectionate to their wives, and reprove their children for breaking a doll's head." That is the end of one paragraph. The next paragraph is: "I have seen four executions, one in London, one in Spain, and two in Paris." Was Sarah dragged to see them by force, as an awful punishment for lapses in the respect due to the dignity of the Comédie Française? She appears to have gone of her own accord. Indeed, she waited all night on the balcony of a first-floor flat in the Rue Merlin to see the execution of Vaillant, the anarchist,

whom she had known personally and had liked. After the knife had fallen, she mingled with the crowd, and was "sick at heart and desperate. There was not a word of gratitude to this man, not a murmur of vengeance or revolt". She "felt inclined to cry out 'Brutes that you are! kneel down and kiss the stones that the blood of this poor madman has stained for your sakes, for you, because he believed in you!'" The wonder is that she did not actually cry these words out. Her reticence must have cost her a tremendous effort. Be sure that she really was horrified, at the time, by the crowd's indifference. Be sure that she really does altogether hate capital punishment. Be sure, too, that she had a genuine admiration for the character of the man whom she was at such pains to see slaughtered. You, gentle reader, might not care to visit an execution—especially not that of a personal friend. But then, you see, you are not a great tragedian. Emotion for emotion's sake is not the law of your being. It is because that is so immutably, so overwhelmingly, the law of Sarah's being that we have in Sarah—yes, even now, for all the tricks she plays with her art—the greatest of living tragedians. If ever I committed a murder, I should not at all resent her coming to my hanging. I should bow from the scaffold with all the deference due to the genius that has so often thrilled me beyond measure. And never has it thrilled me more than through this unusual medium, in this unusual place.

IN AN ITALIAN MUSIC HALL

December 21, 1907.

Among the humbler and less obvious charms of an Italian city I would place high the music hall. I am not, of course, thinking of the big, cosmopolitan, embiographed and emballet'd affair in the principal street, but of the small and very racy one that you find after long gropings in the elder and poorer parts of the city. Outwardly, the tavern of your quest is as any other. No superscription proclaims it a temple of dance and song; no boards are out. But your ear catches through the window-pane the tinkle of a piano and the faint cadence of a voice; and in you go, trying to look as little like a "forestiere" as you can. A needless precaution, this; for Italians never stare, hardly indeed glance at you: the goodness of their manners is proof against any howsoever outlandish apparition. I do believe that if an archangel appeared in this tavern, they would merely make room for him. Not that there would be much room to make. Your first impression, as you enter, is of a black sea of sombreros, or should I say sombreri?—my local colour is lamentably faint where the language of the country is concerned. But room is made for you somehow, and in the smoke-thick and sombrero-thick atmosphere you await the moment when the one and over-worked waiter can take the order which is the price you pay for admission. One and over-worked he is, but not abating in his wild rapidity the grave good-humour and dignity of his race. In the little tavern which I happen to remember most vividly among the very similar others—a tavern not far from the Bargello—the waiter is an exact replica of the portraits of

Cavour, and, despite the agitating life he leads nightly, is so impressive and so gracious that the coffee he serves to you seems at the first sip quite palatable, and the monstrous blend of fire and sugar and water that accompanies it and is called "cognac" fails to poison you outright. One of the duties of this good man is to attend to the clock that hangs on the wall. To a casual eye, this clock might pass muster. It has an honest dial, and indeed does its best, and its best is indeed quite good until it indicates the half-hour. Thereafter, through some decay in its faculties, it can no more. Its minute-hand has climbed down nimbly and well, but cannot climb up. After the lapse of what he takes to be half-an-hour, the waiter borrows a walking-stick from one of the audience, and therewith pushes the minute-hand up and holds it in position whole the clock strikes; after which, for another half-hour, all is well. When first I visited this tavern, a year ago, I imagined that the clock would presently be submitted to its maker and cured of its infirmity. I was delighted, this year, to find it in its old condition, tended by the same waiter in the same manner—a shining proof that romance lingers in a land where commercialism is now thought to reign unchallenged; and I felt a thrill of pride when, one evening, it was my own walking-stick that the waiter borrowed.

Do not think, though, that the clock is the only, or even the greatest, attraction of this tavern. Observe the intense seriousness of the man at the piano, and how strangely a cake-walk sounds when it is pliantly and floridly rendered in the manner of true Italian melody. It is a far cry from Tuscany to "Ga." A far cry, too, from our time to the cinquecento. The proscenium of the little stage is well of our time, with its cardboard surface smeared over with the garish colours that the modern Italian loves. But the back-cloth, quaintly, is an evident copy from some canvas in the Pitti or Uffizi. Those two

white colonnades tapering away on a pavement of white and black lozenges, with a little grove of cypresses beyond, were invented as the setting for an Annunciation or perhaps a Feast of Cana; and strange they seem to us, in this smoky tavern, as a setting for Signorina this and La that. Lest I should seem lacking in courtesy, I hasten to say that the actual names of these ladies are not known to me: the tavern does not run to a programme. But even if I knew the names, I should find it hard to differentiate for you the ladies. That is a part of their charm; they have the appeal that comes of absolute yielding to a tradition, to a convention. They are as the figures on a frieze, these ladies; singly of no account, but irresistible in unison. This one's eyes may be a trifle brighter, that one's satinette a trifle shabbier, than another's. But all of them are very bright-eyed and shabby-frocked, and none is of less than middle age—I mean, of course, Italian middle age, between which and girlhood the interval is so tragically brief—and they all, all sing the same kind of song in just the same kind of way. If you happened to go to the cafés chantants of Paris three years ago, you will recognise all the tunes that these ladies sing. The tunes take just that time to get across the Italian Alps. And if you happen to know Italian, perhaps you will recognise the words as equally old friends. But I suspect they have been "diablement changés en route"; for they are delivered with an air of passionate yearning, or joy, or wrath, which is entirely in the manner of native grand opera, and in the very quaintest contrast with the familiar tinkle of the tune. I never weary of that contrast. And I never cease to wonder how the convention of the French café chantant has contrived to insinuate itself into these taverns of Italy. You never hear a French song hummed or whistled in the street. Most of the workmen and errand-boys who pass by are singing to themselves, with perfect seriousness and elaborate execution, with half-closed

eyes and distended mouths, some scene from Verdi, or Rossini, or Puccini. Grand opera is as much in their bones as is the music hall in those of our own populace. How comes it that they sit nightly listening to alien music for which they have really no use? There they sit serried and solemn, never laughing; never beating time; seldom, and then but faintly, applauding. For three hours or so they sit thus. At length a curtain of striped cotton is drawn across the stage, in token that the singing is over. The three or four unencouraged nightingales presently appear from behind the scenes, one by one, women of the people, humbly dressed, chaperoned by elder women. They sit down and drink syrups. The men pay no heed to them, absorbed in the general conversation for which the drawing of the curtain was an apparently welcome signal. And in due time the waiter borrows a walking-stick, and the clock strikes midnight; and so home.

"ARMS AND THE MAN"

January 4, 1908.

I DO wish I had been in the Avenue Theatre on that night, fourteen years ago, when "Arms and the Man" was first produced. It would be amusing, as a gauge of the changes that time has wrought on me and on things in general, to compare my sensations on that night with my sensations at the Savoy Theatre last Monday. It is on young men, for the most part, that the revolutionary pins his faith. And that is the reason why so few revolutions succeed. The very people who are counted on as co-operators are the very last to co-operate. It is well known that schoolboys are always strictly conservative; but it is not so well known that their conservatism lingers in them for some time after they have left school. Quite young men do not think for themselves: they are dependent on what they have been told. They kneel ever at such altars as are already well illuminated. All the ardour of their youth goes to the worship of well-established gods. For unsanctified new forms, methods, ideas, they have no use. They regard that sort of thing as an impertinence, and are as down on it as the quite old men are. It is only in the interval between eld and youth, before the crabbedness of youth has had time to rest and pull itself together for its reappearance as the crabbedness of eld, that we are really capable of welcoming and understanding new things. I am quite sure that if I had been in the Avenue Theatre on that historic first night I should have been very indignant against the whole affair. In a sense, of course, I should have enjoyed it. I should have admitted that Mr. Shaw was very clever. But his gifts would have

been the measure of my indignation: to think that such talent should be turned to such evil uses! I should have heartily agreed, next morning, with the elderly men who at that time monopolised dramatic criticism on the daily papers, that it was a very cheap joke to represent a soldier as shivering and whining after he had been for three days under fire, and as being in the habit of carrying chocolates into battle. I should have been revolted by Mr. Shaw's cynicism in making a young woman stoop to the telling of fibs—and she no villain-ess! Sergius Saranoff would have seemed to me "a hound", and I should have been ashamed of having been compelled to laugh at him instead of hissing him. The whole play would have seemed to me a disagreeable fantasy. If one must invent, I should have said, the invention must be of a beautiful kind; and I should have had some very severe things to say about jesting on such themes as war and love.

Since that time, and since the time when "Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant" were published, I have come to see that much of this seeming fantasy and flippancy was a mere striving after sober reality, and that the reason why it appeared fantastic was that it did not conform with certain conventions of the theatre which the majority of playgoers took as a necessary part of truth to life. Far be it from me to suggest that Mr. Shaw in "Arms and the Man" gives a wholly truthful picture of life in the Balkan States. There is a rich fantastic streak in Mr. Shaw, and it runs through all his work. What I mean is that he has given us more of the truth than we could have got from the average playwright who has no fantasy whatsoever. A platitude? It would have been a daring paradox fourteen years ago, and is worth enunciating as a measurement of the distance we have meanwhile covered. Mr. Shaw himself has covered some distance. Fourteen years ago he was not so far ahead in form, as he was in matter, of the average playwright. In form, indeed, he was merely abreast of the time.

I should have had nothing to say, fourteen years ago, against the form of "Arms and the Man". How strange and rickety that form seems now! One studies with something of an antiquarian interest the elaborate intrigue that centres around the adventures of Major Petkoff's old coat. How ingenious, but to us how jejune nowadays, that intrigue is! And to think that this sort of thing was what all the dramatists used to labour at and to pride themselves on! Towards the end of the play, when Louka the servant becomes the affianced bride of Sergius Saranoff, we cudgel our wits to find some meaning in the strange conjunction. Does Mr. Shaw mean that the idealist must necessarily——? Peace, peace! There *is* no meaning. Saranoff has been thrown over by Raina, who is going to marry Bluntschli; and in the drama of the early 'nineties it would have been untidy, an offence against symmetry, not to mate Saranoff with somebody before the fall of the curtain. Louka is the only unmarried girl besides Raina, and so it is she who is requisitioned. There would have been "no questions asked" fourteen years ago. Certainly we have progressed. Nor has Mr. Shaw progressed merely in finding the proper form for expression of his peculiar qualities in drama. Those qualities themselves have much developed since he wrote "Arms and the Man". It is a brilliant thing, this play; but shrill in tone, and narrow in outlook, and shallow, as compared with the work of Mr. Shaw in his maturity.

ABOUT PANTOMIME

January 18, 1908.

A SLIGHT drawback to the jollity of the pantomime season, year by year, is that nobody seems to like the pantomimes. I do not say that these productions are not lucrative. Many thousands of souls go to see them. But it is the rarest thing to be recommended by one of these souls to go and do likewise. And it is the commonest thing to hear complaints about this and that pantomime's dulness, vulgarity, incoherence, pointlessness, inordinate length, oppressive glitter, and so forth. As the malcontents do not take the obvious course of staying away from the pantomimes, it is perhaps not unreasonable to doubt the sincerity of their outcries, and to suspect that they take a real pleasure in alternations of music-hall "turns" and awfully expensive spectacles grafted on to a pretence of repeating the story of this or that nursery rhyme for the millionth time.

But a grievance is not necessarily the less genuine because it is unfelt by the people who utter it. And it is a very real pity that pantomime stays sprawling on its old low level, instead of rising towards the heights that are open to it. Pantomime, the one art-form that has been invented in England, an art-form specially adapted to English genius, is in itself surely as attractive as any art-form that the world has known; and it is amazing that no Englishman of genius has ever laid a finger on it. What possibilities could be more immense? To take a legend that you are fond of, or to invent a legend on your own account, and then to set it forth in poetry and prose, with the arts of music and dancing to adorn it, and with nothing to baulk you of

any whim you may choose to indulge in by the way, any irrelevance whatsoever of time or space, so that you are free to celebrate or to satirise anything that is happening at this moment in your own city—off-hand, what chance could be less easy for the man of genius to resist? Strange that the chance should be left in the hands of hacks who can make no use of it! True, there is "Peter Pan". But Mr. Barrie's genius is not many-sided enough to produce a pantomime in the true sense of the word. Humour and fun and fantasy he has. But poetry is needed, too; and Mr. Barrie's sentimentalism is not poetry. Also, he has not at all that gift for which pantomime affords such splendid scope—the gift of satire. Is there among us no man who could supply all the needful qualities? I was amused, the other day, by a leading article in "The Morning Post," deploring the present state of pantomime, and insisting that we ought to have a pantomime that would be a national and immortal classic, worthy to be compared with the works of Aristophanes. The way we were to get it was not by taking any one illustrious person by the scruff of the neck and maintaining our grip till he had produced the requisite article, but by knocking the heads of various more or less illustrious persons together. I forget the full list; but Mr. Barrie, I remember, was to do the legend, and Mr. Rudyard Kipling the lyrics, while Mr. H. W. Lucy was to put in the satire! Evidently the writer of this leading article was more accustomed to deal with politics than with literature. He is betrayed by his naïf notion that there is nothing in England worth satirising outside the musty radius of the House of Commons, and by his not less naïf notion that a good work of art can be produced very much as a strong Ministry can be formed. Not even, as he doubtless knows, does a Ministry of All the Talents make a composite success; and much less hope is there, I assure him, for a pantomime composed by a committee—even though the

members happened, unlike the persons named, to have something remotely in common.

Suppose Aristophanes were re-incarnated as an Englishman in our midst, and were commissioned by Mr. Arthur Collins or another to pour forth all his gifts of poetry, wit, humour, foolery and satire in the form of a pantomime. Undoubtedly, the production would be a popular success, but the satire (which, after all, was Aristophanes' strongest point) would all have to be cut out. There we come to the reason why we are not likely ever to have a pantomime raised to its highest possibilities. In Athens there was an audience for satire. Aristophanes could make a butt of this or that thing in philosophy, in literature, in politics, in religion, with the sure knowledge that none of his most delicate strokes would be unappreciated. The Athenians had no newspapers to keep them posted in the latest developments of philosophy, literature, politics, religion. It might be supposed, therefore, that the satiric dramatist would have an even surer chance of success now in London than he had in unblest Athens. That supposition, however, would rest on ignorance of the fact that, whereas the average Athenian thought and talked a good deal about philosophy, literature, politics, religion, and thus was able to see the point of Aristophanes' jokes, the average Londoner neither thinks nor talks about such matters, and reads nothing in the newspapers except the "disasters" and the "mysteries" and the "social doings" and the accounts of cricket matches or football matches as the case may be. It is for this reason that the attempts to popularise in London something like the Parisian "revue" have been such dismal failures. A few nights ago I was at the Coronet Theatre, where "Humpty Dumpty" is being enacted. One of the comedians, greatly daring, interpolated a joke about Mr. Bernard Shaw: he expressed his delight in the prospect of going "where there is a silent shore".

He waited for the laugh; but not a titter rewarded him; and the "principal boy", to help him out, said, "I'm shore I don't know what you mean"—a remark which the quick-witted Londoners received with roars of merriment. Topical allusions, in London, must be aimed only at Mr. Winston Churchill, and at one or two other public persons of whose existence the public has a glimmering knowledge. For the rest, the jokes must be about sausages, mothers-in-law, and the other few things which are fixed by usage as being funny. Even if the British public had knowledge enough to understand satire on this or that aspect of the more vital things in modern life, I doubt whether they would enjoy it. Instinctively, they mistrust a satirist. Sir W. S. Gilbert's libretti were popular partly through the accompanying music, and partly because of their sheer fun. But, in so far as he was a satirist, he was considered (as is Mr. Shaw to-day) rather inhuman. The chances are, therefore, all against the ideal pantomime. But the annual success of "Peter Pan" should encourage the managers to aim at something above the present level. Why does not one of them "approach" Mr. Chesterton, for example? I can imagine, as the result, an admirable riot of fantasy and fun and poetry. And there is Mr. Belloc. But he could hardly be trusted to keep satire in leash.

Meanwhile, I suppose the production at the Coronet Theatre must be regarded as a conscientious effort towards that higher level at which I am pointing. But it is not the sort of effort which will effect much. Not much can come of foisting touches of Barrie-ism into a quite ordinary pantomime. "Written with a thought for the little ones", says the programme, sweetly. And now and again there appears on the stage a girl, who, in the costume of Little Lord Fauntleroy, is supposed to be dreaming the whole thing. Also, the principal comic man, dressed as Queen Elizabeth, has to pull himself together and

sing a serious song to a company of children in nightgowns—"God bless you, babies! Be babies as long as you can!" I do not suppose this plea for arrested development makes much impression on normal "little ones", in whom the unconscious act of growing is always accompanied by a conscious desire to be grown-up. I deplore it merely as an example of the maudlin and doddering futility of the modern pose towards children.

A MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE

February 15, 1908.

Last week I wrote about a production of the sort that has a long run at a fashionable theatre. This week I write about a production of the converse sort. I trust that a few people, who care about the arts of drama and of acting, will have been moved by last week's article to avoid the theatre where a so fatuous play is being acted with complete lack of discipline by mimes who are mostly incompetent. And I hope that these few people may by this week's article be moved to visit an unfashionable theatre, Terry's, where a masterpiece, "Rosmersholm", is being played nobly. I might say "more than a few people", but for the fact that the day on which this article appears is the last of the days fixed for "Rosmersholm". On this day, however, there is to be a performance in the evening as well as in the afternoon. I strongly advise you to go to one or other of these performances—perhaps to both. Especially do I hope that these words may catch the eye of Mr. Frederick Harrison in time for him to visit Terry's, there to study the methods of his for-a-brief-while-brother-manager, Mr. F. R. Pryor. With what evident care have the mimes been selected for the six characters in the play! And how evidently have they been controlled, with how true a sense for unity, by the stage-manager, Mr. Hubert Carter! It was not enough for Mr. Pryor that they should be well-known mimes. The fact that most of them are well known had probably no weight for him. The thing was to get the right mimes, and then to keep them acting rightly together. In such a play as "Rosmersholm", wherein all

the characters have been meticulously thought out by their creator, and are all full and vital, it is possible even for bad or miscast mimes, under no control, to make individual successes —of a kind. But such successes do not constitute an interpretation of the play. This is a lesson which Mr. Harrison should set to heart, "not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah, not knowing in any wise his own soul, and what it shall some day suffer" in the form of a sudden impulse to produce a play that matters.

In "Rosmersholm" the characters are of two kinds. The play is curious as being the only one of Ibsen's in which the realistic method of his middle period and the poetic method of his first are mingled but not fused. His last period, of course, was the period of this fusion. In "Rosmersholm" there is merely the mingling. Mr. Edmund Gosse, in his critical biography of Ibsen (a fascinating book, of which I shall write so soon as I have an opportunity in these columns), objects to "Rosmersholm" as, for this reason, inartistic. For my part, I find the mingling so deft as to content me, and am unhampered in my enjoyment of either element in the play. But the duality is indisputable. On the one hand, we have a realistic presentment of the sort of thing that was happening anywhere in Norway during the early 'eighties. We see the sparks that were sent flying by the clash of liberalism with tradition. Shall the ex-Pastor openly range himself against the Rector, and have the news blazoned in the local paper?—and all that. On the other hand, we have the strange household of this ex-Pastor. Mr. Gosse, I think, exaggerates its strangeness. There is nothing impossible or essentially mystic in what goes on at Rosmersholm. It would be quite easy to state the story in terms of sheer realism, and not to strain any one's credulity. But such a statement would certainly be horrible, and not less certainly a breach of the good manners with which poetry should be approached. For

it is a veil of poetry that Ibsen has woven around Rosmersholm. There is mystery in the air, and doom; here, where children never cry, and their elders never laugh, and death is heralded by the ghostly coming of white horses. And hither Ibsen conjured Rebecca from the North, almost as darkly as he was to conjure another lady from the sea. And the films of mist that cling about her do not obscure her, nor make her seem unreal, but do merely soften and magnify her outlines, giving to her something higher and more haunting than her reality—making her, in fact, a worthy centre of poetic tragedy. And while, gradually, in the strange way of which Ibsen was master, here a little and there a little, the tragedy that has been wrought by Rebecca is unfolded for us, and the tragedy that is in her is shown to us, and we are made to see with growing clearness the end appointed, it is always a sense of awe, not of horror, that is stirred in us.

Rosmer himself, of course, is the point at which the two elements in the play unite. He is a factor in the turmoil of his town, buzzed around by Rector Kroll, who stands for the old order, and by Mortensgard, the local editor, who stands for the new. On the other hand, he is the inmate of this strange house, and under the influence of this strange woman. Mr. Eille Norwood plays him with due attention to the balance. He suggests a queer strain somewhere in the ordinary good weak man that Rosmer is, and gives us a sense of tragedy impending. The only fault I have to find with him is that he utters his words too slowly—with a slowness greater than is required by tragedy impending. Mr. Edmund Gwenn offers the same fault to be found in an otherwise perfect little presentment of Mortensgard —a perfectly horrible incarnation of caution and malice. Mr. Charles Fulton takes Rector Kroll at the right pace, and gives an admirable performance, never losing sight of the fact that this prig and bigot is a fine fellow. As Madam Helseth, the

old retainer at Rosmersholm, placed there by Ibsen as a chorus —a chorus all the more effective because of its little understanding —Miss Kate Bishop scores throughout by her quiet naturalness; and at the close of the play, when Rosmer and Rebecca have gone out to drown themselves, and she comes in and sees them through the window, she strikes the true note of tragedy. Reading the play, I had always thought this entry of Madam Helseth rather a superfluity and a bathos: why need we be assured of the happening of what we know to be happening? Ibsen, however, had a trifle more sense of the theatre than I have. Madam Helseth's broken words make the catastrophe doubly actual, doubly terrible and haunting. Mr. Hignett plays Ulric Brendel, the strange figure that Ibsen presently reproduced as Eilert Lövborg. In the first act Mr. Hignett seems to me to miss some of the humour of the part, but he gives well, with touches of true pathos, the uncanny poetry of it in the last act. It is difficult to write about Miss Florence Kahn's impersonation of Rebecca; for it is never easy to analyse the merits of great acting. When first I saw Miss Annie Russell, two or three years ago, in "Major Barbara", I despaired of the effort to explain or describe the peculiar force of emotion eradiated by her. A very similar force is eradiated by this compatriot of hers. Rebecca is essentially a vessel for implicit, rather than a vehicle for explicit, emotion. She is a woman who has passed through tortures of the soul, and is now serene. At the beginning of the play the actress impersonating her must not let her serenity deceive us as to the past. And again, when Rebecca has to pass through yet greater tortures, and still, despite them, is calm and self-contained, the actress must not let her own restraint blind us to Rebecca's agony. The part is a very subtle and difficult one, a convoluted one, needing an intellect to grasp it, and extreme skill to express it. Such skill would not, however, suffice. Forthright emotion on the stage

can often be expressed merely by artificial means. But secret emotion can be suggested only through a genuine emotion that is in the player. In the rare moments when Rebecca breaks through her reserve, Miss Kahn betrays the fact that she has a voice of great power and resonance, and a face that will eloquently express the soul. Throughout the rest of the play she never lets Rebecca obviously reveal herself. The suggestion of Rebecca's inward suffering, however, is not the less poignantly dramatic. There is not on the English stage any actress, except Miss Lena Ashwell, who could have made the scene of Rebecca's confession in the third act so moving, so thrilling, as it was made by Miss Kahn. In its appeal to the emotions, Miss Kahn's acting is not more remarkable than in its appeal to the sense of beauty. Throughout the play, not a tone is inharmonious, not a movement without grace. In this respect, her acting reminds me of Mrs. Campbell's. And with Mrs. Campbell she has this further point in common: her sacrifices to the graces are never sacrifices of nature. She is, with Mrs. Campbell, the most naturalistic of actresses; and when Rebecca is merely folding up her knitting, or giving an order to Madam Helseth, or doing nothing in particular, it is—or rather seems to be—just as a real woman in a real room would do such things. And yet, I know not how, one is kept mindful that Rebecca is something more than the lady residing at Rosmersholm. She never lacks the mystery that the poet left on her when he conjured her from the North. The poet's idea, the signification in her of something strange that has happened, and of something terrible that will happen, is never lost for us.

THE SICILIAN ENTERTAINMENT

February 22, 1908.

As Sicily has been so good as to submit samples of her dramatic and histrionic manner, it were but decent in us to return the favour. Which of our West-end managers will grasp the chance of taking out his company to the land of Theocritus and Mr. Robert Hichens? It is mainly from these two writers that I had derived my notions of Sicily; and I was hardly prepared for the shock of the first-hand information offered to me at the Shaftesbury Theatre. I do not hesitate to prophesy that a display of English acting would create a not less profound impression in Sicily. I shall make a point of being there on the first night. Already I see the native audience gradually settling down under the influence of the overture—their savage breasts soothed by "The Lass of Richmond Hill", "Home Sweet Home", and "The Last Rose of Summer." Masculine fingers which, but a minute ago, in every part of the house, had been tightly gripped round hostile masculine throats, and feminine fingers which had been twitching epileptically under the stress of passion for this one or that of the combatants, will all relax and droop and be strangely still. A stillness as of death will reign throughout the auditorium during the performance of the play; not a movement will there be save when one or another of the hypnotised savages turns to his neighbour, to gape a mute inquiry as to who, what, are these strange, quiet, immobile figures across the foot-lights—figures either something more or something less than human. Next day, the critics (all of whom will pretend to know English) will rave about the quality of the acting, and

will deplore that there isn't anything at all like it in Sicily. And the Sicilians, especially the "smart" ones and the intellectual ones (to whom new sensations especially appeal), will simply flock to see the outlandish troupe. Flushed with his success, the manager might then book a season in Lapland, where the effect of his production would be even more interesting to me, as being so exactly analogous to the effect of the Sicilians in London. Tier upon icy tier, I see the Laps sitting huddled, swaddled, their dull faces partially visible under their hoods, a strange gleam discernible in their fishy eyes while the English leading lady is being made love to by the English leading gentleman. I think I hear, through their furry integuments, their poor hearts going pit-a-pat under the stress of this unimagined tornado of passion. The male Laps will wonder whether the wild animal in the black coat is indeed a fellow-creature of their own; and the female Laps will wish they were Englishwomen. The critics, next day, will extol the magnificence of the acting; and some of the more thoughtful among them will perhaps suggest a doubt as to whether the pleasure to be derived from the performance is in any true sense an artistic pleasure. I myself have no doubt that the Laps' delight will be one merely of excitement, of curiosity. Those of them who happen to have lived long in England, and to whom the English modes of emotion are familiar, will doubtless be able to appreciate the art of the leading lady and gentleman aforesaid, and also to be dramatically illuded by the performance. But for the vast majority of Laps such appreciation, such illusion, will be quite impossible. I am not one of the few English people who are conversant with Sicilian ways; and thus for me, as for the vast majority of people here, these strange players come into the category of entertainers, not of artists. A more exciting, a more amusing "show" than "Malia" I cannot imagine. I mention "Malia" because it is the only one of the Sicilian plays that

I have seen. I should not care to see another. My curiosity has been gratified—highly gratified, I assure you—and a second visit to the Shaftesbury would be rather an anti-climax. In the first act of "Malia" the strangeness of the performers is cleverly accentuated by the familiarity of the background. The scene is meant to be the garden of a Sicilian peasant, and there is a dash of local colour in the view of Etna on the back-cloth; but the actual garden, with the hollyhocks upstanding against the Georgian brick wall, and with a lattice window of some pre-Georgian period in the wall of the house itself, has evidently done service in many a vicarage idyll over here, and these hot, wild creatures of the south are the very last people we should expect to meet in it. Sada Yacco and her troupe would not have seemed nearly so incongruous; for they, who came to give us a rather similar thrill some years ago, had at least the air of belonging, like ourselves, to an ancient civilisation, whereas it is obvious that centuries of missionary labour would be needed to give a veneer of civilisation to these admirable Sicilians. Admirable they certainly are, in the strict sense of the word. To watch the Japanese players was a delight, because their every movement and posture was learnedly contrived in accordance to certain elaborate traditions of beauty. It is a delight to watch the Sicilians, by reason of their absolutely natural and untutored grace. See the peasant women swing by, lissom, erect, with baskets upon their heads. Observe the lightning freedom of their fingers when they gesticulate one to another, every finger doing some little eloquent duty of its own, emphasising or qualifying something or other—heaven knows what. Observe Signor Grasso dancing the sort of dance that the hornpipe would be if the British tar happened to be Sicilian. Throughout the play Signor Grasso's deportment is a model of dignity; but he has little to do, and perhaps his dignity does not stand the strain of having to do much: Signora Ferrau's

certainly does not. So soon as she gets under way, which is soon, grace goes overboard. I have no right to doubt that she is a fine actress according to Sicilian standards, and that the capers she cuts and the noises she makes are, according to those standards, very significant and very beautiful. Nor do I suggest that those standards are less good than our own. I merely say that they are, in Lord Melbourne's phrase, "damned different". It is, I imagine, natural for a Sicilian girl to squeak and to squint when she is unhappy; to open her mouth and slap her teeth when she is praying to the Virgin; to throw herself upon a chair, fling out her legs, fling back her head, tickle her throat, and stay there panting, in the posture of a pugilist between the rounds, when she is nearly desperate; and to fling herself to the floor, foaming at the mouth, and arching and straightening her spine, when she is quite desperate. But to us these evolutions have not the meanings that are attached to them in Sicily. They do not illustrate any emotions for us, do not remind us of anything that might be seen outside Bedlam, do but make us smile or shudder according to our temperaments. Nor is it merely that they have no meaning for us. As performed by Signora Ferrau, they give us no visual pleasure—seem to us, indeed, the very negation of grace. Æsthetic judgments can never, of course, be absolute. Beauty is a matter of fashion—local fashion, temporal fashion. I once saw in a Bloomsbury boarding-house a governess who was in face and figure an exact reincarnation of La Bella Simonetta. "Quite unfortunately plain" was the verdict of her fellow-boarders, and doubtless of the passengers in the omnibuses by which she travelled to and from her pupils. She may have cherished the sure knowledge that in her previous existence she had had a great prince for her lover, and a multitude of poets and painters to extol always her loveliness. Similarly, the women of Lapland, uniformly and "quite unfortunately" plain though they seem to us, are many of them

very beautiful to Lapland's men. And the chances are that when one of our theatrical managers, fired by my idea, takes his company out for a season in Lapland, Lapland's men will not think the leading lady beautiful at all. No matter. Her method will seem to them as odd as does Signora Ferrau's to us; and with oddness they will be, as we are, content.

THE GRAND-GUIGNOL

March 28, 1908.

The critics seem to have been disappointed by the performance at the Shaftesbury. A little previous reflection would have steeled them. The tourist, when he emerges, haggard with thrills, from the tiny Théâtre du Grand-Guignol, falters a horrified admiration for the acting—its quietness, its naturalness, by reason of which his illusion has been absolute. Such a performance overwhelms him with wonder. The mimes seem to him demons of genius, stage-managed by the devil himself. Well, these mimes are very good, and very well stage-managed. But the root of the great effect they make is in the smallness of their stage and of their auditorium. Set in a small frame, quite near to you, life-sized, they can carry the conviction without any of the artifices necessary to mimes working under the ordinary conditions. They do not have to raise their voices. They do not have to exaggerate the expressions of their faces. They need indulge in no large gestures. To carry conviction across the footlights of an ordinary theatre, all these tricks must be played; and, naturally, the conviction carried cannot be so strong. No symbol of life, however ingeniously fashioned, can compete with life itself. To act well in the Grand-Guignol postulates, of course, as much art as in any other theatre; but it does not postulate those special artifices which are elsewhere necessary. The effect of such artifices in the Grand-Guignol would be instantly disastrous to illusion. Hardly less disastrous must be the effect of their absence in the Shaftesbury Theatre. On the night of my visit, I could see that the mimes realised the necessity for a mode

different from that in which they had been trained. They were making efforts to act up to the size of their surroundings. But the efforts were timid and spasmodic. With the best will in the world, an artist cannot suddenly learn to do all that he has been taught inveterately to leave undone. And thus the general effect was of under-acting. And lost to us utterly were the thrills, which in any case could not have been so violent as they are in the small compass of the Grand-Guignol. I can imagine how appalling must be, there, the effect of "Les Nuits du Hampton-Club". The play is adapted from "The Suicide Club", and is far more horrible than the original, because all the saving grace of fantasy has been struck out. Not in the poetically impossible London of Stevenson's invention, but in the prosaically impossible London of the Parisian adapter's invention—in actual Paris, to all intents and purposes—do we see those jaded gentlemen snatching an awful joy in gambling with death. The whole thing is quite realistic, quite "convincing", and at the Grand-Guignol must send shudders up the spine. We should share fully there the "émotions violentes" of the actual gamblers. But at the Shaftesbury we merely look on. The agitation of the mimes is not simulated broadly enough to infect us. The scene goes tamely. Similarly is our blood not chilled by "Le Rouge est Mis". A jockey, dying from a "throw", is carried in to the surgeon's room near the course. The surgeon, and his assistant, and the jockey's employer, and the jockey's friends, are far more concerned about the result of the next race than about the soul that is passing. All the horror depends on our sense of the keenness of their pre-occupation, the extremity of their fever. Here again the acting was not laid on thick enough for the required effect. We were left to perform the task of imagining ourselves harrowed—harrowed yonder, in the Grand-Guignol.

Personally, I made no great effort to perform this task. I don't

at all mind being harrowed incidentally. I am always ready to submit myself to the high thrill of tragedy, ancient or modern, and am always grateful to the giver. When horror is used as a means to an end, to illustrate some idea, to point some criticism of life, and so, in the end, to purge me through pity and awe, I am all for it. But horror for horror's sake offends me. I do not say that I always shun it: merely that I am rightly ashamed of yielding to it. Not all the repertory of the Grand-Guignol can be banned as horror for horror's sake. There are always the harmless farces; and even in the ugly episodes, which are the special features of the repertory, there may sometimes be discerned, if not a reason, at least a flimsy excuse for their existence. Thus, among the plays enacted at the Shaftesbury, "Le Rouge est Mis" may be said to contain a criticism of life, cheap enough criticism indeed, but better than nothing. And a similar point may be stretched in favour of "Les Nuits du Hampton-Club". Gone are all the irony and charm and fun with which Stevenson turned horror into delight. Horror, doubtless, was the adapter's sole objective. But there is still a substratum of meaning. What ghost of meaning, however, can the keenest eye detect in such a play as "L'Angoisse" (which is the most typically Grand-Guignolesque thing in the programme)? There are three characters: a sculptor, his doctor, and a girl who is his model. He is conscious of something uncanny in the atmosphere of his studio. He believes it to be haunted. The doctor tells him he has been working too hard, and laughs at his hallucinations. During their conversation, the model falls into an epileptic trance. The doctor, to test her condition, drives a hatpin through her arm. Presently, under his influence, she begins to have a vision of a thing that once occurred in the studio. She sees the previous tenant murdering his wife, and then concealing the corpse by building a column of plaster round it. The column still stands in the studio; and the two men, seiz-

ing hammer and chisel, duly reveal the corpse just before the fall of the curtain. And there you have a perfect example of horror for horror's sake. To the brain, to the heart, no appeal whatsoever: merely a gratuitous, unwholesome tampering with the nerves. I do not say that such a piece can have no claim to be regarded as art. "L'Angoisse" is, indeed, very cleverly constructed. Much care and skill have been used to produce the full effect. What a sorry prostitution of care and skill!

I have so often sneered at the British playgoer that it is a great pleasure to say something in honour of him. It does seem to me a matter for congratulation that native equivalents for such plays as "L'Angoisse" could not possibly become popular in London. And, as that sounds rather unctuous, I hasten to add that there is a very good lesson for London to learn from this visit of the Grand-Guignol. It is lamentable that we have no theatre for the production of short plays. Such a theatre (as tiny as possible) seems to me far more urgently desirable than the national theatre that we talk so much of. Why does nobody found it? The omens are all propitious. We live in an age remarkable for its lack of power to concentrate its mind for a long time on any one subject. It is because of this lack that the new journalism has swamped the old. It is mainly because of this lack that the music-halls are swamping the theatres. The one kind of theatre that need not fear the music-halls is the theatre that I suggest. There would be no difficulty about getting plays for it. To write a long play requires very much more technical skill than to write a short one. (The contrary theory is all humbug.) The only reason why the average writer with any sort of a dramatic idea almost invariably tries to spin that idea out through four acts is that a curtain-raiser does not—how should it?—fire his ambition. Given the certainty that good short plays would be worthily produced, he would turn his hand to short plays quickly enough. It is often

asked, angrily, why none of our millionaires has enough imagination to endow a national theatre. I fancy that their coyness is due less to lack of imagination than to lack of prodigality. Even the dullest millionaire would like his name to go echoing gloriously down the ages; only, the price is rather a stiff one. On the other hand, if a millionaire would found a small theatre for short plays, the chances are that he would very soon be richer than ever. And, though his praises would not perhaps be sung so lustily by the visitors to his theatre as they would have been sung, if he had founded a national theatre, by the far greater number of people who never set foot inside it, he would nevertheless have a very gratifying time indeed.

"GETTING MARRIED"

May 23, 1908.

This play has, as Mr. Walkley suggests, some affinity to Plato's "Symposium". Well, after it has run its course at the Haymarket, Mr. Harrison and Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker might do worse than put up the Symposium. There is nothing arid about Plato. Always the persons of his dialogues are creatures of flesh and blood—presentable, actable creatures. I have no doubt that the Symposium, if it were carefully cast, would come out fairly well on the stage. But I do not fancy it would come out nearly so well there as it does in the study. Certainly, most of the people to whom it is not familiar would miss much of its savour. Some of them, as having exceptionally quick and retentive brains, might be able to do full justice to the progress of the dialectic, following it with never a stumble as it was unfolded by the mimes, and having a perfect grasp of it at the end of the performance. Such brains are rare. You and I, reader, in our respective studies, cannot dash through our Plato at the pace of spoken dialogue. Here and there we must linger and ponder, harking back to previous pages, doing exactly the things that cannot be done by people in a theatre. Certainly, the average member of the audience, never having devoted hours of leisure to Plato, would fail to appreciate the Symposium fully. Very much in that position are you and I, on whom Mr. Shaw's play has been sprung quite suddenly across the Haymarket footlights.

Nay, our position is even worse. For between the method of the Symposium and the method of "Getting Married" lies a

vital difference. Some days before the production of the play, I read in the "Daily Telegraph" an interview with Mr. Shaw. It was obviously written by himself, and thus its contents carried special weight for me. I was convinced that the forthcoming play was wrought in a high and astringent manner, with no concession to the cheapness of popular taste; that it was on a plane with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; that the critics and the public would, as G. B. S. prophesied, be very much bored and incensed. The whole interview seemed to me excellent in point of tactics. Critics of drama, like the critics of the other arts, are a nervous race nowadays. "Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur" is still printed on the cover of the "Edinburgh Review", and you smile indulgently at this quaint survival of the letter of truculence: the spirit of truculence is so long since dead. The critics have been so repeatedly found out. Time after time, their solemn judgments have been ignominiously reversed. The critic of to-day, looking back, is confronted by a long line of gibbets from which his predecessors are dangling, while the men whom they assailed smile down on them from Olympus. It is the artist who has the upper hand to-day. Let a publisher, a theatrical manager, and an art-dealer go down to Colney Hatch, and severally secure the maddest novel, the maddest play, and the maddest daubs on the premises. I prophesy that the critics will (if previously made to expect great things) bow cautiously down as to a revelation of new genius. All the more docile will they be when they are assured by a very successful man, whom they were once rash enough to disparage, that his new work is on a level to which they cannot hope to raise themselves. I myself was rash enough to prophesy that "Man and Superman", though I had delighted in reading it, would be quite ineffective on the stage. I still blush when I remember that pronouncement; and caution strongly inclines me to take any new work of Mr. Shaw's at whatever valuation he may

set on it. Rashness, however, surges up from the positive conviction within me that "Getting Married" has been over-rated by its maker. It seems to me that Mr. Shaw has fallen short of the Beethoven plane through fear of doing the very thing which to readers of the "Daily Telegraph" he so loudly proclaimed himself unafraid of doing: that is, of boring us. Usually, his fun and his seriousness are inextricable one from another: you cannot see where one begins and the other ends. In "Getting Married" the fun does not seem integral: it seems to have been foisted in, for fear lest we should fidget. I conceive that what Mr. Shaw set out to do was to give us a conspectus of the typical tragedies and comedies caused by the marriage laws in twentieth-century England, through the mouths of certain typical characters taken straight from life, characters un-life-like only in so far as they should all be (as, for the purpose of philosophic dialogue, they must be) abnormally introspective and ratiocinative. With this end in view, he drew up his list of characters: Mrs. Bridgenorth, a type of the normal, middle-aged woman who takes the conventional standpoint, and does not bother; her brother, the Bishop of Chelsea, a philosopher, who regards the present state of the marriage laws as irrational and impracticable, and holds that "until marriage be made human it cannot become divine"; his brother, General Bridgenorth, a confirmed sentimentalist; Lesbia Grantham, a spinster whom the General has adored for many years, and who would like to bear and rear children, but has a strong aversion from men, and cannot bear the thought of having a man permanently around her; Reginald Bridgenorth, who, having married a young girl, with unhappy results, goes in for a collusive divorce; Mr. St. John Hotchkiss, the young man whom, for natural reasons, this young wife wishes to marry (tenderly fond though she still is of Mr. Bridgenorth); Mrs. George Collins, another fond but dissatisfied wife, a woman of strongly amorous nature, casting

a spell over Mr. Hotchkiss, who, for his part, is unwilling to offend against the marriage laws, though he regards them as monstrous; Edith Bridgenorth, a young girl who is engaged to be married, but is appalled by the prospect of surrendering all her own responsibility into the hands of her husband; Cecil Sykes, her betrothed, who is appalled, in his turn, by the prospect of taking that responsibility over; with several other characters to represent this and that phase of thought or feeling towards matrimony. I am sure that Mr. Shaw's original intention was to be no more frivolous than Plato would have been in his presentment of these characters. And I am sure that it was only because he was afraid of disappointing the public that he presently decided to make the characters funny. It would be funny to pitch the action on the morning appointed for Edith's wedding; the bridegroom, in due array, fresh from the perusal of a pamphlet by Mr. Belfort Bax, and agonised by the immediate prospect of the altar; and the bride, in dressing-jacket and petticoat, refusing to complete her toilet after having just read some other pamphlet. The General would be in full uniform for the occasion: a sure laugh there. And the local greengrocer would be present to act as butler—happy thought! let him be a re-incarnation of the delectable waiter in "You Never Can Tell". Let Mrs. Reginald Bridgenorth be solicitous as to whether her divorced husband is wearing his chest-protector; and let him have a catch-phrase about her future husband having "a face like a mushroom". Furthermore, let him have supplied evidence of cruelty for the divorce-court by knocking her down in a flowerbed. (In actual life the invariable device is "desertion"; but that would get no laugh.) Let the future husband have run away from a battle in the South African war, and have "The Celebrated Coward" printed on his visiting-cards. And let Mrs. St. John Hotchkiss be the wife of the mayor, so that she can be preceded by a beadle with a mace;

and let her be the wife of a coal-dealer, who has supplied Hotchkiss with very bad coals; and let her have a very bad temper, so that she may try to "jab" the adoring Hotchkiss in the face with a chair, and also be found by the Bishop chasing him round the room with a poker. The Bishop, for some reason, is the one character whom Mr. Shaw has omitted to guy. He is presented as a quite possible person. I suppose it was in the fear that he might pall that Mr. Shaw attached to him a quite impossible chaplain, Rev. O. C. Soames, a sometime solicitor, who regards matrimony as a sin, like any other form of sexual union, against Heaven.

Well, this chaplain and the various other figures that I have described are certainly funny in themselves (though they are hardly on the level of fun that one expects from G. B. S.). In a high-spirited farce they would be very useful. But I protest they are destructive in a play which sets out to be, and of which the greater part *is,* a philosophic discussion of a serious theme. Far be it from me to suggest that such a discussion ought to be conducted in pompous gloom. There is no reason why it should not be amusing. Only, such fun as may occur in it must be merely fun arising from the ideas expressed, or from contrast between the characters of the (quite soberly presented) persons who are expressing themselves. If these persons are presented as figures of fun, how can we be in a mood to listen to them attentively, to take their opinions seriously—in a word, not to be bored by them? It is not we who are at fault. "John Bull's Other Island" was not less "a conversation" than Mr. Shaw's latest play. But there the talkers were recognisable, unguyed human beings, and accordingly we were in a mood to listen to the much that they had to say. We are not lost souls. We can take amusement under the guise of instruction. But Mr. Shaw must not expect us to take instruction under the guise of amusement.

There was an advantage for us in seeing the characters of "John Bull's Other Island" incarnate on the stage: their reality was intensified. It would be similarly an advantage for us to see Plato's Symposium acted. Nevertheless, for the reason given at the beginning of this article, the proper place for both those works is rather the study than the stage. Far more so is it for "Getting Married". Seeing the characters but faintly in the mind's eye, we shall be able to invest them with something of the reality that Mr. Shaw denied them, and to do full justice to the host of valuable ideas that he packed into them.

AN ADRAMATIST

June 6, 1908.

We are, most of us, very dull creatures, very timid and tame. When Fate gives us the chance of behaving in a showy manner, of coming out as saints or scoundrels, we edge discreetly away, leaving the chance to others, who (ten to one) don't take it. Here and there, at some odd moment, a really exciting thing —such as the sudden inheritance of vast wealth, or being struck by lightning—befalls some one of us, so that he, not in himself interesting, becomes an object of passing interest. But these benign occurrences are rare. As a rule, Fate doesn't help us out, and our lot is humdrum, as befits our souls.

Dramatists used to ignore us. They used to fix their attention on the rare spirits among us—the villainous or heroic spirits, bitter spirits or sweet, spirits with a capacity for large and lovely or unlovely manifestations. And such spirits they used to show to us always in the thick of some "dramatic" crisis, so that the manifestations should be fully made. The naturalistic movement in drama is a quite recent affair. It is but very recently that *we* have been deemed worthy the playwright's notice; and we have not yet got over our embarrassment: we shift nervously from foot to foot, mumbling that no play with *us* for its material can be "dramatic". With that epithet, I think, we beg the question. There is no inherent reason why a play should be based on action—on drama. The adramatic play, based on the typical humdrum of human life, is as legitimate a thing, and may be as delightful a thing, as the similarly-based novel to which now we are so well accustomed.

But the maker of that kind of play (as of that kind of novel) starts under a rather heavy handicap. The relation of a playwright to his audience is the same as the relation of any one to the friend whom he button-holes, to tell him something, in a room. The playwright wants to interest his audience, just as I want to interest my friend. The more abnormal the matter of the communication, the likelier is interest to be aroused. Let us, reader, take a homely hypothesis. I come rushing, one afternoon, into your room, and sink breathless on a chair, gasping inarticulately, and holding my hand to my side. You, alarmed at my condition, pour some brandy into a glass, and "Drink this!" you say. I gulp it down, and presently regain composure enough to falter out what has happened. "I have been," I begin, "motoring with the Smiths. I had promised to go down with them to Broxbourne, to lunch with the Browns. We started at eleven. Mrs. Smith was wearing a cap, with a veil tied under her chin. Smith himself wore a cap, but no veil. I remember —how it all comes back to me!—that, just as I was getting into the car, Mrs. Smith said 'I do hope it won't rain.'" Here I pause, staring into space. "Yes," you cry, "yes! Go on!" "Soon before we were in sight of Broxbourne," I resume, "we met a flock of sheep on the road. The chauffeur slowed down. The sheep huddled gradually aside, and one or two of them bleated. Not one of them was run over. After that, I have only a dim memory of what happened: I seem to remember that the Browns were perfectly well, and that we had our coffee in the garden. I remember nothing clearly till, on our way home, we came to a level crossing of the railway. Both the gates were open. The chauffeur, all the same, looked up and down the line. Then we passed across. And—and—here I am!"

Without accusing you of an unwholesome craving for the sensational, I take leave to fear that this story would disappoint you. On the other hand, if I told you quite another story, to the

effect that, just as we were entering Broxbourne, we collided with a car which was coming full speed in the opposite direction, and that both cars leapt into the air, and collapsed in fragments, with every one instantly killed, except myself, who, miraculously saved, ran ahead to break the news to the Browns, and found Mr. Brown in the garden, standing on his head, and Mrs. Brown dressed as Marie Antoinette because (as she said) her children had whooping-cough—why then, I dare think, I should hold your attention, however halting and inadequate my way of unfolding the events.

Yet again, let us suppose that my day had been a quite ordinary one, such as I described in the paragraph before last. And let us suppose me to have a quite extraordinary sense of the superficial foibles of my fellow-creatures, and a quite extraordinary insight into their characters. Then, doubtless, I should be able to rivet you with my narration. The Smiths and the Browns would stand out revealed to you, not merely as themselves, but as types of their class, and as types of all humanity. You would be stimulated, you would be entranced.

Bearing in mind these hypotheses, let us return to the theatre. It is evident the playwright who deals in heroes, villains, buffoons, queer people who are either doing or suffering either tremendous or funny things, has a very valuable advantage over the playwright who deals merely in humdrum you and me. The dramatist has his material as spring-board. The adramatist must be very much an athlete.

Is Mr. Maurice Baring such an one? His play, "The Grey Stocking", produced one afternoon last week at the New Royalty Theatre, gives me the impression that he is very athletic by nature, but that he has not "trained" quite hard enough. His next play I shall probably enjoy more than I enjoyed this one (and that is saying much), not only because he is doubtless training hard for it at this moment, but also because I shall know just

what to expect. I had not expected adramaturgy. I was on the look-out for things happening; and the fact that nothing happened rather bothered me. Adramaturgy is a recent thing, as I have said; and thus, unless we were forewarned that a play is adramatic, we are hardly in the right mood to receive it. We imagine, by force of habit, that a man who writes a play must have something sharply tragic or comic to reveal. We picture him very much as I have pictured myself rushing feverishly into your room to describe my day with the Smiths. And, if his story be in itself no more thrilling than mine was, there is a similar sense of disappointment. Mr. Baring ought to have given his play a more explicit title—"The Potterers", or something like that. For they are all of them potterers, these creatures of Mr. Baring's fancy. Mentally they are alert enough. They talk about all the fashionable topics, and talk well. Not that the play is "a conversation" à la G. B. S. After a while there are signs that the persons of the play are to be more than talkers at large, and that we are to see them under stress of particular emotion—see their souls at work. Lady Sybil Alston is married to a very religious man. A bore is always a rather dangerous person in a play: he is so apt to bore the audience. Mr. Baring is to be congratulated on having created a bore who really amuses us. Lady Sybil, not sharing our amusement, contracts a sentiment for an attractive foreigner who is staying in her house. Mrs. Willbrough has also contracted a sentiment for him. He has made love to her, and she is rather wounded when she finds that the hostess is the person he really cares for. However, she has a regular lover. With him she goes motoring. The other people in the house are rather uneasy when night falls and the couple has not returned. The couple does return, however, a little later. So *that* is all right. Also, it is all right about Lady Sybil and the foreigner. He does not care for her enough to elope with her. Nor does she care for him enough to elope with

him; she prefers to remain with the tedious husband. Well, all this is very true to average life. But in a play where nothing comes of anything, and where no one is an outwardly exciting person, we must be made to know the characters very intimately: else we are in danger of inanition. Mr. Baring gives us deliciously clever sketches of his characters; but he does not give us the full, deep portraits that are needed.

A DEPLORABLE AFFAIR

September 5, 1908.

In the course of a theatrical season, the critic's proud spirit is gradually subdued. Twaddling play succeeds twaddling play, and, as the wearisome procession goes by, the critic's protests become fainter: he begins to acquiesce in what cannot, apparently, be stopped. But when he comes back after a holiday, with a fresh eye, with a soul invigorated by contact with real things and lovely things and things that matter, and comes just in time to see the same old procession starting placidly forth on the same old route, then, oh then, it needs a very great effort in him to control his temper. Why should he try? I shall *not* try. All for art, and the temper well lost, I say. How can Mr. Forbes-Robertson expect me to be polite about his production at the St. James's? In the provinces, recently, he produced a play by Mr. Henry James—a play that was reported to be a great success. It would be a privilege to produce a play by Mr. Henry James, even though the play failed utterly. In its failure, it would be more interesting, and would bring higher esteem to its producer, than any number of successful plays by second-rate men. Having produced Mr. James's play with success, what does Mr. Forbes-Robertson do so soon as he comes to London? Apparently in doubt whether Mr. James be good enough for the metropolis, he gives us Mr. Jerome Klapka Jerome. This tenth-rate writer has been, for many years, prolific of his tenth-rate stuff. But I do not recall, in such stuff of his as I have happened to sample, anything quite so vilely stupid as "The Passing of the Third Floor Back". I do not for a moment suppose that Mr.

Forbes-Robertson likes it one whit more than I do. And I wish his pusillanimity in prostituting his great gifts to it were going to be duly punished. The most depressing aspect of the whole matter is that the play is so evidently a great success. The enthusiasm of a first-night audience is no sure gauge of success. Nor is the proverbial apathy of a second-night audience a sure gauge of failure. It was on the second night that I saw "The Passing of the Third Floor Back"; and greater enthusiasm have I seldom seen in a theatre. And thus I am brought sharply up against that doubt which so often confronts me: what can be hoped of an art which must necessarily depend on the favour of the public—of such a public, at least, as ours? Good work may, does sometimes, succeed. But never with the degree of success that befalls twaddle and vulgarity unrelieved. Twaddle and vulgarity will have always the upper hand.

The reformation of a bad person by a supernatural visitor is a theme that has often been used. Mr. Jerome, remembering the converted miser in "A Christmas Carol", and the converted egoist in "A Message from Mars", and many a similar convert, was struck by the bright idea that the effect would be just a dozen times as great if there were a dozen converts. So he has turned a supernatural visitor loose in a boarding-house inhabited by a round dozen of variously bad people—"A Satyr", "A Snob", "A Shrew", "A Painted Lady", "A Cheat", and so on. Now, supposing that these characters were life-like, or were amusing figments of the brain, and supposing that we saw them falling, little by little, under the visitor's spell, till gradually we were aware that they had been changed for the better, the play might be quite a passable affair. But to compass that effect is very far beyond Mr. Jerome's power. He has neither the natural talent nor the technical skill that the task requires. There is not a spark of verisimilitude in the whole dozen of characters. One and all, they are unreal. Mr. Jerome shows no sign

of having ever observed a fellow-creature. His characters seem to be the result solely of a study of novelettes in the penny weekly papers, supplemented by a study of the works of Mr. Jerome K. Jerome. Take Major Tompkins, and his wife and daughter, for example. Could anything be more trite and crude than their presentment? Major and Mrs. Tompkins are anxious to sell their daughter for gold to an elderly man. "His very touch," says the daughter, according to custom, "is loathsome." The Major persists and says—what else could a stage-major say? —"Damn your infernal impudence!" The unnatural mother tries to persuade the unwilling daughter to wear a more décolleté dress. The daughter, of course, loves a young painter in a brown velveteen jacket; but she is weak and worldly, and she is like to yield to the importunities of the elderly man. The young painter —but no, I won't bore you by describing the other characters: suffice it that they are all ground out of the same old rusty machine that has served "The Family Herald" and similar publications for so many weary years. Mr. Jerome's humour, however, is his own, and he plasters it about with a liberal hand. What could be more screamingly funny than the doings at the outset? The landlady pours tea into the decanter which is supposed to hold whisky, on the chance that the drunken boarder won't notice the difference. Then she goes out, and the servant drinks milk out of the jug and replenishes the jug with water. Then *she* goes out, and the "Painted Lady" comes in and steals a couple of fresh candles from the sconces on the piano and substitutes a couple of candle ends. Then *she* goes out, and the Major comes in and grabs the biscuits off the plate and drops them into his hat. Then *he* goes out, and the "Cad" and the "Rogue" come in and unlock the spirit-case with an illicit key and help themselves to what they presently find is tea. He's inexhaustibly fertile in such sequences is Mr. Jerome K. Jerome. When the "Passer-by" knocks at the front-door, and is admitted with a limelight full on his

(alas, Mr. Forbes-Robertson's) classic countenance, the sequences set in with an awful severity. The beneficent stranger has one method for all evil-doers, and he works it on every one in turn, with precisely the same result. He praises the landlady for her honesty; then the landlady is ashamed of her dishonesty and becomes honest. He praises the Major for his sweet temper; then the Major is ashamed of his bad temper, and becomes sweet-tempered. He praises the "Painted Lady" for her modesty in not thinking herself beautiful without paint; then the "Painted Lady" is ashamed of her paint, and reappears paintless. He praises —but again I won't bore you further. You have found the monotony of the foregoing sentences oppressive enough. Picture to yourselves the monotony of what they describe! For a period of time that seemed like eternity, I had to sit knowing exactly what was about to happen, and how it was about to happen, and knowing that as soon as it had happened it would happen again. The art of dramaturgy, some one has said, is the art of preparation. In that case Klapka is assuredly the greatest dramatist the world has ever known. It is hard to reconcile this conclusion with the patent fact that he hasn't yet mastered the rudiments of his craft.

The third and last act of the play, like the second, consists of a sequence of interviews—next man, please!—between the visitor and the other (now wholly reformed) persons of the play. Steadily, he works through the list, distributing full measure of devastating platitudes, all the way. The last person on the list, the Major's daughter, says suddenly "Who are you?" The visitor spreads wide his arms, in the attitude of "The Light of the World". The Major's daughter falls on her knees in awe. When the visitor passes out through the front-door, a supernatural radiance bursts through the fan-light, flooding the stage; and then the curtain comes slowly down. Well, I suppose blasphemy pays.

"IMPRESSIONS OF HENRY IRVING" *

September 12, 1908.

A VERY pleasant book, this, on a level far above the usual books about deceased actors. It is usually by some hack-journalist, who knew the deceased slightly, or by some pious understrapper who knew him too well, in too special a relationship, to have the faintest notion of what he roundly was like, that such memoirs are undertaken. Mr. Pollock has the prime advantage of being a man of letters; so that we can read with pleasure what he writes. And he has the corollary advantage of having met Irving on more or less equal terms. For many years there was an intimate friendship between the two men; nor was Mr. Pollock so spell-bound by Irving in private life that he could not detect, here and there, some little fault in this and that of Irving's performances on the stage, and point them out to Irving, who, like all men of active and creative mind, was always ready to learn from any one who had anything to teach him. Mr. Pollock's hero was, in some measure, also his comrade. And in the form of this book there is an appropriate free-and-easiness. Analyses of Irving's various conceptions, and descriptions of his "business" at such and such a moment, are mingled, in the haphazard way of table-talk, with reflections on the art of acting in general, and with anecdotes about the great man and his friends. There is a delightful glimpse of Mounet-Sully, about to start on a journey from London to the south coast, and being taught "some dozen complete English phrases" by Mr. Pollock and Robert Louis Stevenson. Why does that glimpse stand out so delightfully?

* By W. H. Pollock. Longmans, Green & Co. 1908. *3s. 6d.*

There are a score of glimpses of Irving, not less vivid, not less amusing in themselves. Why does this one outstand? Because, I fear, "R. L. S." is in it. Him I never met; and not even he can have had a personality stranger or more magical than was Irving's as I so well remember it. And yet Stevenson is more real to me, means and matters more to me, than Irving. He worked in a durable medium. His work survives; and so he survives with it. Irving is but a memory, to be conjured forth from darkness. Mr. Pollock himself speaks of "the hard fate" of actors in all ages, and tries to console himself and them with "the fame, to take two instances, of Roscius and of Garrick". But, frankly, who cares twopence about either Garrick or Roscius? Suppose there were living at this moment some extremely old gentleman who had seen them both, and remembered both of them distinctly, should we—even the most stage-struck among us—be very keen to read that old gentleman's book of reminiscences? However great his skill in writing, he would not give us any clear or trustworthy vision, would not make us participate in his own enthusiasm. Mr. Pollock, very rightly, does not essay the impossible task of displaying Henry Irving's art to posterity. He writes solely for those who have seen Irving, taking all the essentials for granted, and pausing over just this and that incidental detail that may have escaped our notice, or may have been misunderstood. And already, despite the glow of his interest, these details have something of the dryness of archæology—the dryness that clings about things that are over and cannot be renewed. Despite Mr. Pollock's glow, I am conscious of a severe chill when he speaks of "the always charming Nelly Moore", "the always excellent acting of Mead", "Frl. Ulrich, then in the zenith of attraction and of dramatic subtlety and power", "Dettmer, who died all too young". Even had Dettmer lived just long enough for me to see him and to applaud him frantically, I should not now be very much interested in my recollection of him. But then, of course, I

have not the advantage that Mr. Pollock has: the advantage of being a really ardent playgoer, to whom the theatre is a temple of high ecstasies. I can enjoy *a* theatre, when there is a good new play well-acted. "The" theatre means little to me; and its past, nothing.

It is only outside the theatre, in the contemplation of life at large, that I get *my* high ecstasies. And thus, since Irving was certainly one of the most remarkable personages of his day, the parts of Mr. Pollock's book that most interest me are those in which he tells us of Irving as he knew him in private life. Every one, even the least sensitive one, the most impervious one, who ever met Irving, must have in some measure felt the magnetism of the man. Mr. Pollock, as I have said, did not succumb so utterly that he could not be a useful friend, an adviser. Yet he succumbed rather too far to be now able to give us of Irving a portrait that we can accept as perfect. He was not, indeed, so magnetised that he did not ask Irving whether the guests for supper on the stage of the Lyceum, all crowded under a marquee, would not fare badly in case of fire. Irving soothed him by revealing to him "some" of the precautions, "which alone would have been enough to reassure the most timid. And," adds Mr. Pollock, ashamed, in retrospect, of his misgivings, "if the marquee itself had suddenly come crashing down I feel sure it would have been a case not of 'impavidum' but of 'impavidos ferient ruinae'. Irving's presence and demeanour would have reassured all who were tempted to panic, while his quiet commands would have brought order from chaos." I am afraid that I, suddenly buried under a heavy and inflammable sheet with a hundred other people, should have been one of "those who were tempted to panic" and that even the "presence and demeanour" of my host, similarly buried somewhere but issuing "quiet commands", would not have sufficed to make a man of me. Perhaps I

should have felt all right if I had been, like Mr. Pollock, constantly in touch with Irving, and charged thoroughly with his magnetism. And then perhaps, too, I should, like Mr. Pollock, not dare to breathe on the legend that Irving was, in addition to his genius for acting, a great scholar and a man of exceedingly fine taste in literature. Mr. Pollock must know, none better, how absolute a legend this is; but he will not breathe on it. In "Much Ado About Nothing" Irving "by an oversight fell upon employing an entirely modern phrase" as an "aside" in one of the dialogues with Beatrice. Some weeks later Mr. Pollock saw the play again, and the offending "aside" was still in use. Then he spoke to Irving, who was grateful for the hint. For "by an oversight" read "because he did not know better". Left to act for himself, Mr. Pollock was always bold enough to help Irving in matters of literature. But he was, on one occasion at any rate, easily deflected by "a light, meaning touch" on his arm from one of "the trusted and confidential marshals" who guarded Irving's majesty. One evening "Irving was sympathetically and generously enthusiastic over Tennyson's work, and, referring to the beautiful lines beginning 'There was a little fair-hair'd Norman maid'—a speech which he always delivered as one rapt in it—he expressed a strong doubt if there was anything in Shakespeare to be preferred to it." Mr. Pollock, "startled"—but was he really startled?—"by such a delivery from such a source", was about to protest, when he felt the aforesaid touch on the arm, and said nothing. I wonder if it was Mr. Loveday, that faithful henchman, who administered the touch. Irving was trying various sets of sledgebells for "The Bells". He "began to eliminate them one by one until one set was left for final consideration. Then he listened more carefully than ever to that set, and then he turned to Mr. Loveday, a very accomplished musician, and said: 'Now, isn't that the right set?'—a question which provoked an emphatic

'Not a doubt about it' "—an answer which Mr. Pollock offers as a proof of Irving's omniscience, and not as having the slightest element of comedy in it.

Irving had many faithful henchmen, of various grades. I think, however, that Mr. Pollock goes rather too far in saying that he inspired "a real affection in all—actors, supers, and stage-hands alike, who ever worked with or under him". That he was much loved by many people is quite true. It is a saying that would be equally true of any man of genius. Whistler, for example, was much loved by many people. But he was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, "loveable." As a rule, he inspired fear rather than love. I would not say that of Irving; though I would say that in the love he inspired there was always a strong admixture of fear, and that in many cases the fear he inspired was (as a matter of common knowledge) not mitigated by love. In every man there is a mixture of kindness and unkindness. In Irving both these qualities existed in a very high degree; and the number of wonderfully kind things that he is known to have done is hardly greater than the number of wonderfully unkind things that he is known to have said. When Richard Mansfield was playing Hamlet in London, he told Irving, at supper, how awful the spiritual exigency of the part was to him, how he suffered all that Hamlet suffered, not only during the performance, but throughout all the hours of day and night. After Mansfield had dilated at tremendous length, and with tremendous force, on his sufferings, Irving removed his cigar from his lips, and said "I almost wonder you play the part, since you find it so—unwholesome." I quote that remark because it is so particularly good an example of the sardonic humour for which Irving was famous, and of which Mr. Pollock offers no example whatsoever. To ignore Irving's cruelty is to ignore a very salient part of him. Which quality predominated in him—cruelty or kindness? He was an actor, and, even more obviously than most actors, he acted a great deal in

private life. How far were both his kindness and his cruelty exaggerated for effect? And, again, how far was his early Bohemian self merged and lost in his later Pontifical self? Did he actually become, at last, what he wished to seem? The people who knew him best are the people least likely to enlighten us in these problems. His magnetism, even through the pavement of Westminster Abbey, is still too strong on them.

"THE CORSICAN BROTHERS"

September 26, 1908.

I HAD never seen this play, and had supposed it would appeal only to the antiquarian in me, and was surprised to find the simple playgoer in me really thrilled by it.

Not that it didn't delight me as a curiosity, too. In the sophisticated modern mode of dramatic exposition, derived by us from Ibsen, our old friend "the confidant" has no place; and for that old friend I have a sneaking kindness. He always touched me, with his humility, his utter selflessness, his inexhaustible capacity for framing apt questions and drinking in the answers with a look of dog-like devotion. He never thrust himself forward, never was there when he wasn't wanted, but, when he *was* wanted—and with what sweet frequency he *was!* —instantly he turned up with a string of his invaluable questions, and stood at 'tention to be tapped on the chest by the hero, his hero, as often as need be, and never moved a muscle of his devoted face lest our attention should be distracted to himself. Each of the Corsican Brothers is a hero, and to each of them is attached a confidant of the deepest dye. Fabien dei Franchi owns M. le Baron de Montgiron. To Louis dei Franchi belongs M. le Baron Martelli. To which nobleman the palm? One might as well hope to discriminate the characters of their twin masters. Enough that they are both perfect. When the ghost of slain Louis appears to Fabien at the end of the play, "Farewell, dear brother", says Fabien, "we shall meet again". Fabien can afford to wait, I daresay, as being himself a living souvenir of the departed. But how about poor M. le Baron Martelli? What

is become of *him?* Let us hope Fabien takes him on as joint-confidant with M. le Baron de Montgiron. But this would be rather hard on Montgiron, that faithful soul. So let us hope Martelli blows out his brains and goes to join Louis in heaven, there to ask such questions as are necessary to the angels' understanding of who and what on earth Louis on earth was. . . . "Tell me, Louis! When first, as a child, you felt within your breast the chords of that mysterious affinity for your twin-brother which you have just explained to me, was there vouchsafed to you a premonition of your own untimely doom?" But no, I cannot hope to imitate the manner of the dialogue in "The Corsican Brothers". Such dialogue is a lost art—lost to all of us save Mr. Pinero alone. "Be generous enough to call my carriage, and permit me to depart!" cries Mme. Emilie de Lesparre to M. de Chateau Renaud. The true Pinero touch there! But, whereas in Mr. Pinero's plays this kind of lingo is vexatious, and we feel it our duty to try and break Mr. Pinero of it, in "The Corsican Brothers" it has an agreeable quaintness, the aroma of a past age—an age for which we are not responsible. Of course, human beings never talked like that; but that *was* how the dramatists used to write, thirty years or so ago; and we are interested and touched, even as by the costumes of the persons of the play. Mr. Martin Harvey is never perfunctory about the costumes in his productions. He always seems to have procured some good artist to design them. And in "The Corsican Brothers", so soon as the venue shifts from Corsica to Paris, we have a really good presentment of the fashions of 1830—that most amusing of all periods. The scene of the Foyer de l'Opéra is a perfect realisation of Gavarni, with just that romantic pathos that Gavarni has for us. But come! I am writing as though I had not been thrilled by the play itself.

Melodramas about modern English life don't thrill me, because

they don't illude me. But how should I be sceptical about anything in regard to Corsica and 1830? I could believe anything of the ladies and gentlemen in Gavarni's drawings. And as for Corsica, she is in herself notoriously melodramatic. Vendettas apart, did she not give us Napoleon? How should I reject the Franchi twins? Their mother, sweetly solicitous for their credibility, says twice in the course of the first act "In Corsica we are still in the sixteenth century." Never mind the sixteenth century, madam: Corsica's enough for me. And have no fear, madam, that I shall doubt the extraordinary powers of mutual telepathy said to be possessed by your two fine sons. When Sir Henry Irving produced the play, doubtless there were many who said that such powers could never have existed even in Corsica. In the middle-Victorian era telepathy was regarded as a silly superstition. In all ages, presumably, there have been cases of telepathic communication; but not till lately have they been scientifically investigated and collated and forced on us as solid facts—facts as solid as the Marconi rays. That Fabien in Corsica should know that Louis in Paris was in danger, and that Louis should thereafter appear to him at the moment of death, seems not at all strange to us; and all the greater, therefore—all the more personal—is the thrill we get when the murdered brother appears. The end of the first act—Fabien's decision to start forth and avenge Louis forthwith—left me in a state of lively speculation as to what would happen. Never having seen the play, I was not sure that Fabien had not set out on a fool's errand. Telepathy is a tricky thing—might be so even between twins. Once I woke up in the middle of the night *knowing* that a friend of mine, many miles away, was in utmost distress. I could not go to sleep again, paced up and down my room, and, as soon as the telegraph office opened, I wired *Are you all right*. The answer was *Yes quite why*. I received it with mixed emotions. Usually, when I tell the story, I say that the answer

was *Desperate will write.* I am, in fact, one of the people who bring discredit on psychical science. The strength of my belief goads me to the manufacture of proofs for sceptics. I did not, of course, suspect that Fabien dei Franchi was a fellow-sinner in this respect. But it was quite possible that the apparition which he—and I, too, for that matter—had beheld, might be a mere hallucination, signifying nothing. And I reflected that it would be great fun if, on his arrival in Paris, he found his brother Louis perfectly well, thank you, and making desperate love to the lady of their twin hearts, Mme. de Lesparre. But that was not to be. The second act (whose action is simultaneous with that of the first) shows that Louis is perfectly correct in his behaviour. He is merely trying to rescue Mme. de Lesparre from the toils of M. de Chateau Renaud, who is "a destroyer of women" and the best fencer in Paris. Louis has never handled a foil; so that he would naturally have some presage of doom, to account for his obvious depression. In case he should cheer up, however, his father's ghost has risen to assure him that he will perish on the morrow—at ten minutes past nine, to be precise. I clutched faintly at the hope that perhaps the message would be falsified; but of course Louis perished punctually. A few days later, in the same glade of the same forest, we see M. de Chateau Renaud on his way to Switzerland. This time, it is *his* turn to have forebodings. He feels that some power is holding him for the avenger. His post-chaise has overturned, and, as he says with doubtful logic, "the post-chaise was not overturned because the postillion was drunk. The postillion was drunk because Fate had willed that the post-chaise should be overturned". Doubt his logic, but not his forebodings! Enter Fabien, with forebodings of triumph. They begin to fight; and, after the first bout, in case we should still make any mistake as to what is coming, M. de Chateau Renaud says good-bye to his second.

I do wish that just something in the play, here and there, were left to chance; or at any rate that the characters themselves were not quite so acutely presentimental. It is the fashion to say—I often say it myself—that without freewill there can be no drama. Certainly (with all deference to the Greeks) the persons of a play are by so much the less interesting when they are presented as puppets of destiny. Still less interesting are they when they are presented as puppets who know exactly which wire the show-man is going to pull next. Therefore—but why theorise? The solid fact remains that "The Corsican Brothers" really thrilled me, even moved me. You might not think so, from my manner of writing about it; but I can't help my manner.

AGONISING SAMSON

December 19, 1908.

For good downright boredom, mingled with acute irritation, commend me to the evening I spent last Tuesday in the theatre of Burlington House. The Milton Tercentenary has produced a fine crop of dullness and silliness, but nothing quite so silly and dull as this performance of "Samson Agonistes" under the auspices of the British Academy and under the direction of Mr. William Poel.

Let "Samson Agonistes" be read, by all means. (I wondered how many members of that academic audience had ever read a page of it.) It contains (along with many passages of arid prosiness, which may well be skipped) some passages of noble poetry, over which one may well linger. But even an ideal performance of it would be tedious; for there is in it no dramatic quality whatsoever: Milton was out to edify, not to thrill. In a play constructed exactly on the Greek model, the Chorus must, of course, be rich in moral platitudes. Milton's Chorus of Danites is rich in them beyond the dreams of avarice. And—here comes in the sting for us—so is Milton's Samson. "How counterfeit a coin they are who friends bear in their superscription (of the most I would be understood:) in prosperous days they swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head, not to be found, though sought." These are not the words of the Chorus. They are Samson's own, and a fair sample of his abundance. Between him and the Chorus is kept up a friendly rivalry in triteness. "My friends," he seems to say, "you see me here betrayed, blinded, cast out, grounded, a mock to my enemies. No matter! I can still

take the lead in edifying conversation. Yes! every cloud has a silver lining. It is a poor heart that never rejoices. There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught" etc., etc. Even Dalila, the one dramatically imagined person in the play, has a taste for copy-book headings; and we feel that Samson enjoys her visit, brutal though his manner to her is. What prevents him from being in the least a dramatic figure is his sober acquiescence in what has befallen him. No Prometheus he! No conflict in *his* bosom! He regards himself, he points himself out to us, as an awful example. He had blurted out to Dalila the secret which he ought to have kept to himself; and for that indiscretion Jehovah has punished him, severely indeed, but not one whit too severely; and anyhow "these rags, this grinding, is not yet so base as was that former servitude" to his wife. He regrets that he is no longer able to serve his people against the unrighteous Philistines; for himself he rebels not at all. He does not even want to escape from his bondage. His father comes, with a proposal to have him ransomed. That idea doesn't at all appeal to Samson. "Let me here," says he, "as I deserve, pay on my punishment, and expiate, if possible, my crime, shameful garrulity." (Cf. "Mrs. Turner's Cautionary Tales in Verse", *passim*.) Dalila comes, trying to reawaken his passion for her. In this scene there might easily have been a real conflict in Samson. Milton saw the opportunity. "Beauty, though injurious," says the Chorus, "that strange power, after offence returning, to regain love once possess'd, nor can be easily repulsed, without much inward passion felt, and secret sting of amorous remorse." But Milton wasn't going to be so unedifying as to *take* the opportunity, not he! and "Love-quarrels oft in pleasing concord end," remarks Samson dryly, "not wedlock treachery endangering life." It is only just towards the end of the play that a glimpse of drama is vouchsafed to us, when Samson begins, at length, "to feel some rousing motions" and decides that he

will, after all, betake himself to the temple of Dagon. But before that point was reached in the performance on Tuesday evening, I had betaken myself out of Burlington House, bored beyond endurance by the intrinsic dullness of the play, and beyond endurance exasperated by the series of gratuitous and grotesque blunders in the method of its production.

Against Mr. Poel's arrangement of the stage I have nothing to say. The tenebrous array of purple curtains that was so ludicrously wrong in his production of "The Bacchae" was not inappropriate here. (A lady sitting behind me remarked to her companion, before the play began, "Evidently this is going to be something in the Greek style." A great tribute, this, to Mr. Poel's educational influence.) Nor was I embarrassed by the hoop and the Medici collar that Dalila wore while the rest of the characters wore some sort of vaguely Phrygian attire. Such anomalies are dear to the mystic heart of Mr. Poel, and one makes shift to accept them for that reason. My quarrel with Mr. Poel is on larger issues. I take it that the first, the most important, task for a producer of this play is to find an actor who can be a passable Samson. The scope of the investigation is narrowed by the fact that only a man of great height and breadth can be Samson without making himself and the play that depends on him utterly ridiculous. The man must have a tremendous voice, too, and must be able to manage it with such skill, such power of variety in elocution, as is needed for the proper recital of many hundreds of lines in blank verse. I do not know of any man on the English stage who could be really successful as Samson, except Mr. Hubert Carter. He, perhaps, was not available for this occasion. But if it was impossible to find a likelier man than Mr. Ian Maclaren for the part, Mr. Poel ought to have asked leave of the British Academy to shelve the production altogether. Any one less like a blinded and brooding giant than Mr. Maclaren I cannot off-hand conceive. He has, certainly, a sense for

verse, and his delivery of the long speeches was never monotonous in cadence. For the meaning of the verse, however, and for the character of Samson, he seemed to have no sense at all. Or perhaps the sense was in him, and he was simply unable to express it, by reason of the quality of his voice. A deep and resounding voice is even more important than great physical bulk. Mr. Maclaren has neither the one requisite nor the other. His voice is a baritone, a very pleasant baritone; and the sound of it was as inappropriate to Samson as were Mr. Maclaren's graceful attitudes. I think I strained a point in suggesting that this voice, and not lack of imagination, may account for the absurdity of Mr. Maclaren's performance. For the voice was used in a lingering and sentimental manner that cannot have been otherwise than intentional. I should like to see Mr. Maclaren as the Duke in "Twelfth Night". But I was sorry to see the Duke in "Twelfth Night" as Samson. Before I pass from the subject of Samson himself, I must speak a word or two about the youth who led him on to the stage. The stage-managing of this youth is a good example of the strange workings of Mr. Poel's mind. As if to emphasise the fact that Mr. Maclaren is not gigantic, the youth was stationed, throughout Samson's first long speech, on the step above him. And throughout all Samson's speeches, the youth stood close to him, but with his back turned to him (and presenting to the audience a strongly Semitic profile, in order to remind us, in Mr. Poel's freakish way, that Samson was a Jew and that Mr. Maclaren is a Gentile).

This immobile, averted, Semitic companion of the giant would in himself have sufficed to wreck even an ideal performance. But, as if to leave nothing to chance, Mr. Poel had contrived a yet more devastatingly ludicrous effect in the management of the Chorus. Samson appeared through an entrance at the side of the stage. One would have supposed that the Chorus would appear through this or some adjacent entrance. But trust Mr.

Poel to have an ace up his sleeve! The theatre in Burlington House, as perhaps you know, is a semicircular one, with about twelve steep tiers of seats rising one above another. These tiers are divided by gangways, for people to pass down to their seats; and at the top of these gangways are the entrances to the theatre. After Samson's first speech our attention was attracted by a weird twittering noise at one of the entrances. The twitter developed into a murmur of feminine voices. Are the militant Suffragists upon us? we wondered, gazing up towards the door. A score of vaguely Phrygian figures came in view, and began to pick their way (very slowly, for fear of tripping up) down the steep gangway, ululating all the while, in our midst; and then the magnitude of Mr. Poel's inspiration dawned on us: here was the Chorus of the play! Of course, there could be no archaeological reason for this mode of entry. Aesthetically, of course, there could be no reason for it, since it must obviously destroy all aesthetic illusion, and send us all into paroxysms of internal laughter. So delighted was Mr. Poel at his joke that he repeated it till it grew just a little stale. Dalila came on by the door at the side of the stage, presumably because her hoop would have stuck in the gangway. But Manoa came down the gangway in fine style, and then up it again, as soon as his scene was over; and so did Harapha. Mr. Lionel Braham, who played the latter, is a man of truly gigantic proportions, and had assumed an incredibly fee-fi-fo-fum demeanour, so that Harapha's refusal to tackle Samson was one of the crowning absurdities of an absurd evening. The poor ladies of the Chorus, cramped and huddled together, failed to give the grace of audibility to the words they had to utter. But one of the two or three men of the Chorus seemed to be thoroughly enjoying his evening, and gave an elaborate character sketch of a rural dotard, somewhat in the manner of Mr. Chevalier.

MISS ELLEN TERRY'S BOOK

October 10, 1908.

Once I went behind the scenes of the Lyceum after the first night of some play. (Reassure yourself, there was nothing indecorous in my going: I was not yet a dramatic critic.) Somewhere in the middle of the stage, but quite invisible and inaccessible by reason of the dense crowd of friends around him, stood Henry Irving. Everybody seemed to be standing on tip-toe, peering bright-eyed over heads, and everybody was talking at the top of his or her voice, and everybody's theme was composed of "Henry" and "Ellen" in about equal proportions. They all knew one another; and all, diverse though they were, were united in the bond of their hero-worship and heroine-worship. The crowd grew and grew, and though, according to Mr. Walter Pollock, Irving was always extraordinarily careful about every detail of his great hospitality, and foresaw every smallest requirement, there were no policemen to regulate us. Presently, having abandoned all hope of setting eyes on my host, I was consoled by a vision of Miss Terry. Accompanied by three or four of the ardent and picturesque young ladies who attach themselves to the suite of any very eminent actress, she was making her way down the narrow and crazy-looking wooden staircase that led from the dressing-rooms to the stage. Half-way, she paused suddenly and clasped her hands up in front of her as she gazed down at the sea of bobbing heads. The gesture betokened a mingling of rapture and fear—the emotion of a wood-nymph about to take her first plunge in the sea. Nor was it merely my sense of beauty that was stirred: the sense of history was stirred, too, in

me, and I thought of the many, many other occasions on which Miss Terry must have descended this staircase, to mingle with this adoring throng. Endlessly they unfurled themselves to me—the first nights, the hundredth nights, the last nights, on which she had beheld this sparkling sea outspread beneath her. And I wondered what, at this moment, was passing through her bonny brain. Was the whole thing as fresh as ever to her? Did she really, as her mien indicated, feel herself half-allured, half-terrified, by the prospect of a plunge into waters unknown? Or had she, after all these years, become habituated, as to the morning bath?

I think she felt just what she displayed. Of course, to any actor or actress, who has experience, emotion becomes a habit; and a display of emotion by him or her is apt to be less significant than such display by us who are not called on to be emotional for our livelihood. But the emotion, though it be not fundamental, and be out of all proportion to its cause, and leave no trace when it is past, is not necessarily to be scouted as unfelt. Miss Terry, as her book * shows, has a great power of detachment; and, had she not been born an actress, would have been —indeed, is, even so—a very good dramatic critic, and a very good critic of life. But it does not follow that her emotions, on or off the stage, are not all of them, at the moment of experience, perfectly genuine to her. And, actress though she is, it is clear from her book that she has more capacity for what I have called fundamental emotion than half-a-dozen ordinary women rolled into one. She is a woman—a very extraordinary woman —first, and an actress afterwards. I do not say she is not a born actress; merely that the born woman in her preponderates. This is not an original criticism of her. She makes it herself, more than once, in the course of her book. And throughout the book it is her insatiable love of life, rather than of the stage, that shines

* "The Story of My Life." By Ellen Terry. London: Hutchinson.

forth for us. When first she crossed the Atlantic, "the ship was laden with pig-iron, and she rolled and rolled and rolled. She could never roll too much for me! I have always been a splendid sailor, and I feel jolly at sea." One can well imagine that. But her jollity on land is quite enough to go on with. And there is in her retrospect a curious absence of that sadness which ordinary people feel when they think of what is past. Cares and sorrows she has had, but she looks back on them with the clear brow of one who was very well able to bear them. And her joys she records with the gusto that is possible only to a person who is just as joyous as ever. "I am afraid," she says—and this seems to be the only thing she *is* afraid of—"that I think as little of the future as I do of the past. The present for me!" Those last four words are a perfect summing-up of her nature, and might serve as a motto for all optimists. But it is by very reason of the delight she has always had in the passing moment that she writes so well about her past. It is because she saw things and felt things so vividly at the time that she can now make us partakers of her vision and emotion. Her emotional faculty has, as I suggested, been developed by the practice of her art; and just so must her visual faculty have been developed by communion with the painters and sculptors who clustered about her from the outset, seeking and finding inspiration, and giving such inspiration as they could in return. Her descriptions of people's appearances are always delightful—consisting usually of some image funnily far-fetched yet scrupulously exact. Of Mme. Bernhardt she says "transparent as an azalea, only more so; like a cloud, only not so thick. Smoke from a burning paper describes her more nearly", and of another well-known lady "she reminded me, as always, of the reflection of something in water on a misty day", and of Irving in his last phase "he looked like some beautiful grey tree that I have seen in Savannah". Of Irving when she first knew him she says "there

was a touch of exaggeration in his appearance—a dash of Werther, with a few flourishes of Jingle", and of William Terriss, "sometimes he reminded me of a butcher-boy flashing past, whistling, on the high seat of his cart, or of Phaëton driving the chariot of the sun—pretty much the same thing, I imagine". The precision of these harlequin-leaps is positively Meredithian. And you can see that Miss Terry has been at pains here to give the exact literary expression to her thought. It is only rarely that she writes in that clean-cut manner. Her writing is for the most part frankly the writing of an amateur. But when an amateur happens, like Miss Terry, to be a born writer, the result is always charming, and one may well be thankful for the lack of professionalism. The average professional writer knows and cannot forget the easiest recipes for expressing this or that, and therefore expresses this or that exactly like all the other average professionals, and therefore expresses nothing of himself. Style is the expression of self. Every (gifted) beginner has style, and it is very rarely that when he has mastered the technique of writing his style comes out unscathed. Yet it is only after technique has been mastered that style can become beautiful in itself. Miss Terry might perhaps, if she gave her mind to it, become a really beautiful writer. The chances are that she would but lose that quality of freshness and life which makes her writing so adorable now.

COQUELIN'S DEATH

January 30, 1909.

When a man dies quite suddenly in the fullness of his powers, we are apt to think that Fate has been unkind to him. This is a confusion of ideas. Who would not wish, just for his own sake, to die just such a death? The blow by which Fate strikes down a flourishing ordinary man is cruel only in its effect on those who were his friends. When a great man is stricken down untimely, then there is a vast number of people to be condoled with—people deprived, without warning, of a treasure that they had thought would be theirs to enjoy for many years. The death of Coquelin may without hyperbole be described as a blow to the whole educated world. And the blow falls most heavily on those who knew the man himself, not merely because they lose in him a delightful friend or acquaintance, but because they were of all people the least prepared for his death. His air of soundness and robustness behind footlights was as nothing to what it was in private life. Sixty-eight years old he was, according to the newspapers. It seems impossible. Time had pushed him into middle age, and then had grown tired of the exertion and had left him standing there unmolested, privileged, a brilliant fixture. He had the toughness of the peasant, without the tasks that make the peasant grow old. His stout little legs seemed to be rooted in the soil. It was hard to believe that his father had been a baker. One would have said that a bakery was too artificial a place for the production of so earthy and windy a creature as Coquelin. "Intellectual" though he was, he had no "nerves" to

trouble him. His brain found all the food it needed in his blood and muscle.

On the stage it was always with his brain alone that he made his effects. He had observed, and studied, and thought, and had thought out the exact means of expression. He never let emotion come between himself and his part—never trusted to imagination or inspiration. These, indeed, are qualities which he did not possess. They are incompatible with absence of "nerves". And it was, I suppose, because he could never surrender himself to a part, was always conscious master of it, that Sarah Bernhardt wrote of him in her memoirs that he was "plutôt grand acteur que grand artiste". Certainly, great emotional acting does demand the power of self-surrender—is a passive rather than an active business. Coquelin, in his writings and in his talk, was a sturdy champion of Diderot's paradox. And Coquelin, in the last act of "Cyrano de Bergerac", was a shining refutation of the truth of that paradox. All the paraphernalia of emotion were in that memorable passage of acting—were there most beautifully and authentically; but emotion itself wasn't there; and many a duffer could have moved us far more than Coquelin did. If Coquelin had been capable of the necessary self-surrender, he would not have been the unapproachable comedian that we loved and revered. It was because his fine brain was absolutely his master that he stood absolutely alone in his mastery of comedic art.

That he has died on the brink of what he believed would be his greatest triumph, and of what probably would have been his greatest triumph, will have seemed to many people an especially cruel fate for him to have suffered. There is no doubt that during the past seven years or so the prospect of "Chantecler" was the very pivot of his being. He had always had, very rightly, and very engagingly, an enormous self-esteem. But its centre of gravity seemed, in the past few years, to have shifted away from

the past and present into the future—always the immediate future in which "cette admirable génie", Rostand, would complete and let go the MS. of "Chantecler". Years ago, a Frenchman whom I know, and who has a great talent for mimicry, gave me a general "sketch" of Coquelin saying stridently, with his sculptured elocution, "Moi, je ne parle jamais de moi; par-ce-que"—whereon followed a series of the most cogent and lucid reasons for Coquelin's avoidance of the topic. Like all the best satire, this satire was based on a sympathetic understanding of its butt. The mimicry could not have been so perfect if the mimic had not been truly fond of Coquelin. In later years he emended his "sketch": "Moi, je ne parle jamais de 'Chantecler'; par-ce-que"—. It was always mainly of "Chantecler" that Coquelin would talk to me whenever in recent years, and wherever, I had the honour of meeting him. And always it was in Dieppe (whither he went annually) that he talked with greatest unction and élan. Always an expansive man, he seemed to expand beyond measure in Dieppe. The manager of the Casino, M. Bloch, was an old and devoted admirer of him and his art, and always placed at his disposal a suite of rooms on the Casino's terrace. Year by year, Coquelin's first appearance on this terrace was a great occasion, semi-royal, but wholly human; a sight that did one's heart good. Splendid in a brand-new white yachting-cap and a pair of brand-new white shoes, and swinging in his hand a brand-new white umbrella, he came forth into the sunshine—sunshine than which he was more dazzling to the abonnés. "That's he!" or "That's him!" whispered the English ones. "Voilà la saison qui commence," murmured the French ones, with a smile that failed to conceal awe. And he, "la saison", was a picture of happiness, as he stood inaugurally there, with a plump thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat, and with his head thrown back at the well-known angle, snuffing the ozone through those great comedic nostrils. After he had stood awhile, he

would make his progress along the terrace, flanked on either side by some friend or henchman for whose benefit he talked and talked, slowly, impressively, delightedly. "Moi, je ne parle jamais de 'Chantecler'; par-ce-que" . . . Now and again he would pause to salute or accost a passing friend, but always thereafter resumed the thread of his discourse. It was a pleasure to watch the splendid mobile mask that was his face; and the pleasure was greater when you yourself were elected as a companion—as a receiver of laws laid down by him in a voice that was like the twanging of a violoncello, and of theories elaborated in a penerating whisper and with the cunningest of smiles. His manner alone would have sufficed for edification. But it was a strong and subtle brain, Coquelin's, and what he said was always as good as the way he said it. To converse with him might have been rather up-hill work. I fancy he was not a man to encourage interruptions. But I may be wrong. I was never tempted to interrupt; so well worth while was it to listen.

The last time I saw him, which was five months ago, he was fuller than ever of "Chantecler"—the beauties of it, the inspiring difficulties of it. He spoke especially of the scene in which he, as the cock, would call upon the sun to rise, and would address it, as it rose, in a speech of more than a hundred alexandrines. With tremendous relish he recited two or three score of these, but keeping his face absolutely expressionless, and keeping his hands behind his back. For there was the prime glorious difficulty: to hold the audience solely through the voice, since the face and hands would be hidden by the complete outfit of a cock. Once or twice he scraped the ground with his foot. That was the only gesture a cock would have. . . His little eyes shone and danced with delight as he dilated on "le besoin d'achever l'impossible". He declared that Fate had been very good to him in giving him in his old age an absolutely new task, to make him young again. Rostand had all but finished now, at

last—only a few more touches to be added by "cette admirable génie"! The piece would be produced in the autumn—oh yes, for certain.

I admit I was inwardly sceptical about that date. Coquelin himself, through his bitter experience of the coyness of "cette admirable génie", may have had doubts, too; but these he would not have admitted even to himself, dear sanguine soul! When autumn passed into winter, and still there was no imminence of "Chantecler", I was not surprised. But sooner or later, thought I, in this long-drawn contest between a nervous poet and a sanguine actor-burgess the victory would be to the sanguine actor-burgess. Sooner or later—and it turned out to be sooner. Last week I heard that the nervous poet had come out from the Pyrenees, with his wife, and his sons, and his sons' tutor, and his doctor, and his valet, and his chauffeur, and with "Chantecler" itself, and had made his entry into Paris. My heart was glad for Coquelin. I could imagine his look of triumph. I could imagine him throwing off his "grippe" in a twinkling. . . . Even now I can hardly imagine him dead—dead by such a master-stroke of irony. It seems impossible that Fate should not have spared him to drink the cup she had at last raised to his lips.

A terrible master-stroke, certainly. But terrible for us, not for the man stricken. He died without warning in the midst of his gladness; a death that is to be envied. And who knows that the cup raised to his lips was not a cup of bitterness? "Achever l'impossible"! Would even Coquelin have achieved it? He might have failed, even he. And that would have, figuratively, broken his heart. Perhaps it is well for him and us that he died as he did die, literally of heart-failure.

"THE FROGS" AT OXFORD

February 20, 1909.

It has been my custom to tell the truth about the performances of the O.U.D.S. And, in so doing, I have paid the members a higher compliment, really, than they have received from my brethren, who have not thought it worth their while to utter anything but hasty and empty little eulogies. I doubt whether the members have always been properly grateful to me; but I will not depart from my custom of veracity. And, this year, truth compels me to congratulate them heartily on a great artistic success: a play performed with genuine spirit and conviction; a performance infectious in its jollity. I was not able to be in Oxford on the first night, and it is but the dress-rehearsal that I have seen. Dress-rehearsals are not usually infectious in their jollity. The usual conditions reigned in the Oxford theatre on Tuesday evening—a dim auditorium, shrouded in grey sheets; here and there, dim figures seated, silhouettes of anxiety; now and again one of them darting up and scrambling over obstacles to confabulate in whispers with one of its fellows, and then either dashing out on some dark errand "behind" or relapsing into immobility. Maeterlinck's early plays would thrive well in this dim atmosphere of sporadic tension. Aristophanes demands bright lights, and a full audience of cheery irresponsibles. But he managed to do without them on Tuesday evening. Such was the gusto of the performers that, with nothing to carry the infection, I was kept rejoicing.

It was a joy indeed to see a Greek play treated not as a curiosity, but as a quite fresh and vital thing; to see it treated, in that

respect, just as the Greeks treated it. I felt that now I did not regret the terrible hours I had spent in London at performances of Euripides. The memory of those very terrible hours gave a zest to my present pleasure. Metropolitan mimes are not, for the most part, on free and easy terms with Greek tragedy, and Professor Murray's translations are to them but a trifle less awe-inspiring and courage-destroying than the originals. Their effort to conceal stage-fright under a lugubrious pomposity is in itself so tragic that we lose all sense of the tragedy they are trying to enact. On the other hand, every undergraduate is familiar enough with "The Frogs"; it was a part of his curriculum at school, quite lately, and is one of the lines of least resistance in "Mods"; and he takes to it on the stage as a duck to the water. Aristophanes, moreover, is quite well-fitted to the modern theatre. As I have so often said, the tragic dramatists of Greece need always a theatre after the pattern of that for which they wrote. But space and air are not requisite to Aristophanes' not-elemental spirit. Indeed, I think that beneath the sky a great deal of his fun must have evaporated, and many of his shafts have missed their mark. He is the most intimate of satirists, and his place is indoors. The interior of a modern theatre for him seems not a bit anachronistic; for who more modern than he? True, he is, above all things, rollicking, whereas the satirists of our own day are evidently sad at heart even when they are kicking up their heels. They are depressed by the mockeries they mock at, and their knowledge of history has taught them that ridicule never kills. Aristophanes, on the other hand, always lustily rejoices in his objective, and goes for it in the manner of a man certain that he is going to victory. And yet the effect of him is as of a man born into our own time. Ridicule never kills: it dies, and an early death at that. The lampoons of the last generation, how grisly they are to us! But, wherever a high state of civilisation is, at whatever date, there is Aristophanes in the midst of it, alive and kicking, as

fresh as paint, and perfectly apposite all round. No scholar of any nation will ever make a standard translation of him. For, while the vernacular changes, and the idioms of ten years ago are not our idioms, Aristophanes is always sharply contemporaneous, and only through the slang of the moment can his dialogue be given as it deserves. Professor Gilbert Murray's translation, which is printed with the text of the acting edition of "The Frogs", has not perhaps the full virtue that is to be found in his translations of Euripides. It seems to me, reading between the lines, to come less from a spontaneous impulse than from a desire to achieve a tour de force. As a *tour de force* it is amazingly good, in its thorough command of early-twentieth-century colloquialism. And the performance of the original by the O.U.D.S. is just as thoroughly and rightly modern.

MR. HENRY JAMES' PLAY

February 27, 1909.

From Jerome to James—from "The Passing of the Third-Floor Back" to "The High Bid"—it is rather a long way for an actor to travel, is it not? And yet my first impression of Mr. Forbes-Robertson, at the Afternoon Theatre, was that he had walked literally out of the one play into the other. The last I had seen of him was his back, graciously bowed, as he passed slowly out of the front-door of the Bloomsbury lodging-house, with a momentary illumination in the fanlight to show that "The Stranger" was more or less divine. And now it seemed as if the stage had just been swung round on a pivot: here was the front of "The Stranger"; the tender, grave, gently radiant front; emerging, however, not into Gower Street, but into the hall of a great old house in the country. Knowing that the central man in Mr. James' play, besides having served in the Army, was an active worker in East-end settlements, and not a mere aimless rambler in Jeromian platitudes, I rather feared that he had not found an ideal representative—that he had found too idealistic a representative—in Mr. Forbes-Robertson. But my misgiving soon vanished. The actor soon threw off the sublimity of mien that was needed to make Mr. Jerome's sort of thing pass muster, and showed that for the interpretation of Mr. James' sort of thing he was exquisitely equipped. "What are you exactly?" asks Captain Yule of the aged and shabby butler who is in charge of the house; "I mean, to whom do you beautifully *belong?*" There, in those six last words, is quintessence of Mr. James; and the sound of them sent innumerable little vibrations through the

heart of every good Jacobite in the audience. Mr. Walkley, properly vibrant, treasured the words up to be the refrain of a criticism for which all we fellow-Jacobites of his are grateful to him. The words could not have been more perfectly uttered than they were by Mr. Forbes-Robertson. We realised at once to whom *he* beautifully belongs. It is to Mr. Henry James. Mr. Walkley, I notice, places the word "beautifully" between two parenthetic dashes; and certainly this way of notation gives the true cadence better than the way that I have used—the way that Mr. James himself would use; but it is still very far from the perfection of Mr. Forbes-Robertson's rendering of the words. "To whom do you—beautifully *belong*?" is nearer. But how crude a medium print is—or even hand-writing—for expression of what such a face and voice as Mr. Forbes-Robertson's can express! In his eyes, as he surveyed the old butler, and in his smile, and in the groping hesitancy before the adverb was found, and in the sinking of the tone at the verb, there was a whole world of good feeling, good manners, and humour. It was love seeing the fun of the thing. It was irony kneeling in awe. It was an authentic part of the soul of Mr. James.

When I think of Mr. James' books, and try to evaluate the immense delight I have had in that immense array of volumes, it seems to me that in my glow of gratitude the thing I am most of all grateful for is not the quality of the work itself, but the quality of the man revealed through that work. Greater than all my aesthetic delight in the books is my moral regard for the author. This confession, if it chance to meet his eye, may startle him. He was not in Paris in the early 'seventies for nothing. His "form" in fiction rigidly forbids self-assertion. Not his to button-hole us and tell us what he thinks of his characters. We must find out about them for ourselves. No philosophics will be expounded to us, no morals pointed for us. The author, as at the Afternoon Theatre the other day, "is not in the house". Well, this

is a "form" like another. It is not, as it was thought to be, final, inevitable; it is already going out of fashion. Certainly, if illusion of reality were the sole aim of fiction, this "form" would be the only right one. Reality flies out of the window when the author comes in at the door. Nevertheless, even the most retiring author must, in the nature of things, be somewhere concealed on the premises; and you will find him if you look for him. Mr. James is devious—say, in a cupboard in the basement. But rout him out: the "find" is its own reward, and an ample one. "E. A. B." of the "Daily News" pronounces that Mr. James, whose books he has read, is "a clever man"—a remark that gives me somewhat the impulse that Charles Lamb had in regard to a gentleman who had fired off precisely that remark about Shakespeare. How much more than clever Mr. James is, how many qualities unrelated to cleverness are in him, is measured for us by the fatuous inadequacy of this remark from a man who is, as "E. A. B." is, himself a very clever man. "Subtle", adds "E. A. B.", as a make-weight. It is the Gradus epithet for Mr. James, and saves time. But I am sorry for any one who, having read even but one or two of Mr. James' earliest short stories, could find no other epithets to affix. And you need search heart and brain for epithets to describe the later James—the James who has patiently evolved a method of fiction entirely new, entirely his own, a method that will probably perish with him, since none but he, one thinks, could handle it; that amazing method by which a novel competes not with other novels, but with life itself; making people known to us as we grow to know them in real life, by hints, by glimpses, here a little and there a little, leaving us always guessing and wondering, till, in the fulness of time, all these scraps of revelation gradually resolve themselves into one large and luminous whole, just as in real life. To read (say) "The Golden Bowl" or "The Wings of the Dove" is like taking a long walk uphill, panting and perspiring

and almost of a mind to turn back, until, when you look back and down, the country is magically expanded beneath your gaze, as you never saw it yet; so that you toil on gladly up the heights, for the larger prospects that will be waiting for you. I admit, you must be in good training. People often say "Oh, what a pity it is that dear Henry James won't write the sort of books he *used* to write. Do you remember 'The Portrait of a Lady'?" etc., etc. I always hint to these people, as politely as possible, that an artist's business is not to keep pace with his admirers, and that their business is to keep pace, if possible, with *him;* and that, if they faint by the way, they will be safer in blaming themselves than in blaming *him*. Mr. James, that very conscious and devoted artist, may be trusted, he especially, to have followed the right line of progress—to have got the logical development of his own peculiar gifts. I know no fictionist so evidently steeped as he is in the passion for literature as a fine art—none who has taken for his theme writers and writing so often, and with such insight. "The Pattern in the Carpet", "The Aspern Papers", "The Death of the Lion", "The Middle Years", "The Lesson of the Master"—where is the literary passion and conscience drawn for us so lovingly, and analysed so cunningly, as in these grand short stories by this master? That his sense of beauty is not confined to the manifestations of art in letters, that he has a passionate eye for what is fine in the arts of sculpture and painting and architecture, and for what is fine in Nature, is very manifest to all readers of him in his early and middle periods. And sometimes I cannot help regretting that in his present period he vouchsafes us none of those extraordinarily sensitive visual impressions that were so integral a feature of his tales. Gradually, austerely, they have been banished, these impressions of his, by force of that greater passion of insight into the souls of men and women. I had nearly written of "ladies and gentlemen". For it is very true that Mr. James does not deal with raw

humanity, primitive emotions and so on. Civilisation, and a high state of it at that, is the indispensable milieu for him; and just when the primitive emotions surge up in the complex bosoms of his creatures, to cause an explosion, Mr. James escapes with us under his wing, and does not lead us back until the crisis is over—until the results, the to him so much more interesting results, may be quietly examined. I suppose it is by reason of his avoidance of emotional crisis even in the most complex bosoms, that Mr. James has so often been charged with lack of human feeling. Well, there are all sorts of human feelings; they aren't all summed up in "Antony and Cleopatra", there is plenty of them left over; and Mr. James' characters are made to display a very full share. The feeling that they display most constantly is the feeling for right and wrong, for what is noble in conduct and what ignoble. It is by this that they are especially preoccupied, whether or not their conduct be—it usually is—thereby conditioned. The passion of conscience, a sort of lyrical conscience, conscience raised to the pitch of ecstasy, both in great matters and in small, is what is so common among Mr. James' characters that one might almost take it as a common denominator. When you find the creatures of a creative artist animated thus by one recurring motive, you need not be a skilled detective to "spot" the main characteristic of that artist as man. Despite his resolute self-suppression for his "form's" sake, Mr. Henry James, through his books, stands out as clearly to me as any preacher I have seen perched up in a pulpit. And I do not happen to have heard any preacher in whom was a moral fervour so great as (with all its restraint) is Mr. James' fervour, or one whose outlook on the world seemed to me so fine and touching and inspiring, so full of reverence for noble things and horror of things ignoble—a horror and a reverence that are never obscured for me by the irony that is so often Mr. James' way of writing. More perfectly, perhaps, than in any other work of

his do we find expressed in that dear masterpiece "The Altar of the Dead" the—but I am coming to the end of my "space", and have done so very little to justify the title of my article.

My excuse must be that of all that I love in Mr. James's mind so very little can be translated into the sphere of drama. I well remember reading "The High Bid" in the volume entitled "The Two Magics"; and it was clear to me that the story had been conceived (and perhaps written) as a play and then wrought into narrative form. The arrangement of entrances and exits was proof enough of that. But further proof was in the trite conventionality of the story—precisely the sort of story that a true man of letters would select, for a venture in dramaturgy, muttering, "I suppose this is the sort of thing they understand." Needless to say, the workmanship was exquisite; and the characters, though essentially puppets, moved with a lively grace and distinction, a bright reality of surface, so that you half forgot they were unreal. What I say of the story is equally true of the play. I have spoken already of the delight it is to hear Mr. James' dialogue from the lips of Mr. Forbes-Robertson, who is not merely Captain Yule but a figure that evokes innumerable cherished memories of Mr. James' books at large—the very spirit of Jacobeanism. Mr. Ian Forbes-Robertson is fine as the old butler. And Miss Gertrude Elliott's vivacity and touching grace are just what are needed for Mrs. Gracedew. "The High Bid" is not the only story that bears traces of having been conceived by Mr. James as a play; and I hope Mr. Forbes-Robertson will soon claim the one or two others. For, little though Mr. James can on the stage give us of his great art, even that little has a quality which no other man can give us; an inalienable magic.

A TOUCHING DOCUMENT

April 10, 1909.

I WILL not forget to take away with me, for Easter, the Report of the Shakespeare Memorial Executive Committee. It has been in my possession for the past fortnight or so. But I am not tired of it yet.

Strong in every man, as in every child, is the instinct for fantastic building. The child builds with sand, or with wooden bricks, peopling the rude and fugitive edifices with the creatures of his imagination, and furnishing them throughout with such luxuries as are dear to a child's heart. If, when he grows up, he become a philosopher, or remain a poet, his manner of building will be but little changed. From the dull chaos of things as they are he will be seeking sanctuary in some little private and personal Utopia, where every law is exquisitely just and unquestioningly obeyed; or you will find him lolling at ruined casements of his own design, his eye roving over some kind or another of faëry seas forlorn. If he happen to be just the average practical citizen, he will charm his leisure by constructing in minute and businesslike detail some ideal organisation that might possibly, some fine day, be established on the plane of actuality. Being (as neither the philosopher nor the poet is) grègarious, he will prefer not to work alone. He will be happiest on a committee. To move a resolution, to beg to second an amendment, to rise to a point of order, to say "ipso facto" and "ex officio" and "ad hoc", to cry "Hear, Hear" or "Oh, oh", to move that a sub-committee be appointed to consider such and such a matter, to serve on that sub-committee, to call an extraordinary general

meeting—all these are functions very dear to the heart of the average man. Why they should be so, I cannot conceive; I merely state the fact. When this dear flummery is combined with the revolving of his pet ideal, then the average man feels that his cup of joy is brimming over.

I should not like to be a constant attendant at the meetings of the Shakespeare Memorial Executive Committee. That way, for me, madness would lie. But this Report, the garnered fruit of those deliberations, does make glad my heart. In every line I can see what joy has gone to the making of it. True, among the signatories there is a sprinkling of literary artists and of actors; and they, I conceive, have not been partakers of the general rapture. But most of the signatories are just average practical citizens with a soft corner in the heart for the notion of a National Theatre, and with a passion for serving on committees. And they have been having the time of their lives. Oh wooden bricks! Oh sand! Oh permanence of the imaginative faculty! Oh fuss! Oh pomp! No detail of organisation has not been considered, no possibility has not been foreseen and weighed. Nothing could be more thorough if everything were not in the air and likely to remain there. One cannot be too careful. Does it ever occur to you, reader, when you are weaving a castle in the air, that some unscrupulous person or persons might come and oust you from the woven premises? Be warned in time. Aëreally safe-guard yourself, before it is too late. The dear gentlemen of the Executive Committee are "of opinion that in order to provide for the legal ownership of the Theatre and of the Endowment Fund, steps should be taken for the incorporation of the Governing Body, either by Royal Charter (should His Majesty in Council be pleased to approve of the grant of such a Charter), or by License of the Board of Trade under Sec. 23 of the Companies Act, 1867 (30 and 31 Vic. c. 131)." Can you not hear the dear gentlemen rolling that phrase "His Majesty in

Council" over their tongues, slowly? And then the sweet alternative, "License of the Board of Trade under Sec. 23" . . . . You can see in the eyes of those dear gentlemen a rapt, veiled look, as at the sound of viols and dulcimers . . . . . "Companies Act, 1867" . . . "If music be the food of love, play on," they murmur; "give us excess of it that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die" . . . "30 and 31 Vic. c. 131." And the music grows more and more voluptuous. There are to be "Five Governors appointed by the Crown" and six by the elder Universities, and one by the Royal Academy, and another by the British Academy. These are to serve for five years. But certain other Governors, such as they who are to be nominated by the London County Council, and by the Corporation of London, and by the Municipalities of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dublin, are to serve not a moment longer than three years. I know not why this distinction has been made, but I can well imagine the joyousness of the long and subtle debate that preceded it. India, it seems, is not to be allowed to nominate a Governor. Only the self-governing Colonies are to have a look-in. The President of the Board of Education is to be an ex-officio Governor. So is the Ambassador of the United States. So are various other seemingly irrelevant worthies. The Commander-in-Chief, the Chairman of the Thames Conservancy Board, the Astronomer Royal, and the Senior Magistrate at Bow Street Police Court have, for some reason, not been included in the list. Let them not feel hurt. Let them not feel that the Committee did not think them likely to be just as useful as the others to the cause of dramatic art. I take it that the reason for their exclusion was simply in the Committee's fear that an unlimited indulgence in the ecstasies of imagination would bring satiety in its wake. And, after all, there is still a chance that the list of Governors will be extended. The Committee does not definitely commit itself on all points

of policy. It considers, for example, "that should any Governor, appointed for a stated time, die or resign during his term of office, or should any of the above-mentioned bodies waive its right of nomination, or should any ex-officio Governor decline to serve, the vacancy so created might be filled by co-option". "Might", you observe, not "shall". Evidently there was a strong anti-co-option clique in the Committee, and a compromise was the only way out. Oh sand and wooden bricks! Oh energy and subtlety and pomposity and triviality! The Report goes on, from clause to clause, in an ascending scale of unconscious humour; and the names of the signatories—with the Lord Mayor first, then some peers, and then the commoners in alphabetical order —are not an anti-climax.

Let us strain our imaginations a little. Let us suppose that all this solemn enjoyment is destined to be remembered not as an end in itself, but as a prelude to the actual establishment of a National Theatre. Let us suppose that the necessary £500,000 forthcomes. What sort of a theatre would be the result? All institutions, howsoever cheerful the auspices under which they are started, tend to become, in course of years, stodgy. This National Theatre would be stodgy at the outset—so stodgy that I don't suppose it would tend to become, in course of years, stodgier. What of vitality, what of any real interest, could be vouchsafed us in a theatre governed by a standing committee appointed by these Governors from amongst their own ranks? Imagine the dulness, the deadness that would result from the various highly-respectable compromises between the minds of these various highly-respectable Governors. The Governors, I have no doubt, would enjoy their dabblings, just as this Committee has enjoyed its. But £500,000 is a tall price to pay for their fun. The fun would not filter through to the community. In one way and another, we get all the performances of Shakespeare that we need; and as for "revivals of whatever else is vital in

English classical drama," what else really is vital? "The School for Scandal" and "She Stoops to Conquer" lived by reason of the public's desire to see this and that mime in this and that celebrated part. But who, really and truly, in his heart of hearts, wants to see a performance of a play by Ben Jonson or any other Elizabethan or Jacobean, or by Congreve or any other Restorationist? These plays are interesting curiosities, and many of them may be read with enjoyment. But, as plays, they are dead utterly; and a theatrical production of any of them is a mere rattling of dry bones. Again, what "recent plays of great merit" have been "falling into oblivion"? And when, as so very often happens, we see a revival of a play which we admired (say) five years ago, are we not invariably appalled by the shabbiness that has come over it, and puzzled to account for our old admiration? "To produce new plays and to further the development of the modern drama"—ah! there is a thing worth doing; a thing that ought undoubtedly to be done. But I am not—and I hope no one is—quite such a fool as to suppose that new young dramatists, with new young ideas and methods in their heads, are going to get any help from an institution governed by a great number of highly-respectable gentlemen desperately afraid of making a mistake and so lowering the prestige of their precious institution. What is needed, of course, "to further the development of the modern drama" is a quite small theatre, decently endowed, with one enlightened despot to govern it. The Court Theatre, for example; and, for example, Mr. Granville Barker. Of course, he could not do all the work single-handed. He would have to have a committee working under him. But the less eminent were that committee, the better it would be for that theatre. After a long and tedious debate in my own breast, I recommend that the committee be composed of six policemen, selected in annual rotation from six of the divisions of the Metropolitan Police Force, each selection being made by the Divisional Inspector in co-operation

with two Sergeants, such Sergeants to have held their rank for a period of not less than three years, and such selections being subject to the veto of the Chief Commissioner, if such veto be upheld by the Home Secretary; and furthermore . . . but no! I take an exquisite pleasure in reading that sort of thing, but I won't waste time in writing it. I will leave my idea undeveloped—just a bright and promising idea, that may take root in the mind of some bright and promising rich man. I don't advise any one, however rich, to subscribe so much as a shilling to the National Shakespeare Theatre. All the shillings that can be spared should go in the direction of a small theatre without any flummery about it, and with some such person as Mr. Granville Barker at the head of it. That theatre would be of real use. The most that can be said of the National affair is that it would do no harm.

I don't want to be unkind to the committee of the National affair. I shall be very glad, for their sakes, if their scheme is realised after mine has been realised. But I object to their useless scheme as an obstacle to my useful one. I ask them to be so good as to drop it for the present. After all, they have drawn up, with infinite labour and delight, their monumentally ridiculous Report. What more do they want?

MADEMOISELLE PANDORE

May 29, 1909.

In the court of Le Roi Soleil dwelt a certain Mademoiselle Pandore, hardly less powerful, in her way, than the reigning favourite; and even more artificial; and far more lasting. Favourites reigned and were sent packing. But Mademoiselle Pandore queened it year after year, and was unquestionable law to all the ladies around. She was life-sized, and stood upright in the centre of a room specially set aside for her. She was made of painted card-board; and her clothes, which could be taken off, were of the same lowly material, but were always of the latest fashion—the one and only authentic fashion, the fashion with which all ladies, young and old, must conform. Whenever the King, in his wisdom, decided that corsages should be lengthened or paniers be made more ample, or coiffings and mantillas be exalted, or jewels and flowers and "mouches" be worn thus and thus, his decree was illustrated on the person of Mademoiselle Pandore, into whose presence all the ladies of the court came forthwith, attended by their maids and their modistes, to take humble and careful note of the change appointed. It was from Paris, even in those days, that fashion radiated. The action of the rays was slow, but sure. And thus Mademoiselle Pandore made her influence felt in all the courts of Europe. She survived the death of her master—survived Louis XV., too, and all his favourites, and fell only when the head of Marie Antoinette fell from the block. It is not known what became of her. Perhaps the sans-culottes tore her limb from card-board limb. Last Monday afternoon, on a platform in a room at

Prince's Restaurant, a re-creation of her was presented to a large assembly by Mr. John Abbot, an erudite Bostonian, who seemed to know all about her. You must be an American if you want to be filled through and through, in every fibre, with an intense sentiment for the past of Europe. You must have had President Roosevelt bawling moral platitudes at you for many years from the roof of the White House, if you would savour fully the rapture there is in contemplation of the sublime futilities of the gospel according to Le Roi Soleil. But for his evident sense of humour, I doubt whether Mr. Abbot would have been able to address his audience at all: he could only have serenaded Mademoiselle Pandore on a viol of the period, with large American tears coursing down his either cheek. As it was, appreciating as much the absurdity as the charm of his subject-matter, he gave a delightful lecture. He had made the doll with his own hands, and had painted the various costumes and their accessories with a skill equal to his curious knowledge; and every time he showed her in a fresh costume, or with some modification of the costume she was wearing, he cast for us a succession of admirable little side-lights on the manners of the time—manners that were partly reflected by the costumes, partly conditioned by them.

Nowadays, fashion is inseparable from caprice. The engines of science have made the whole world restless. People are not satisfied with this or that: they want the other, and are always seeing that they get it—get it instantly, in some extreme form. But there was no restlessness, no caprice, in the fashions that were set by Mademoiselle Pandore. The thing that most struck me among the many things to be deduced from Mr. Abbot's survey was the slowness with which in the great era of frivolity one fashion was evolved from another. Essentially, costume never changed; it merely developed. For more than a decade the general aspect might be left exactly as it was, only the details being modified or accentuated, or new details introduced. But always

these new details were truly novel—true inventions. Nowadays, the designer of dresses, though always agog for novelty, can invent nothing. Like the architect, or the designer of furniture or pottery or any other visual object, he can but hark back to this or that period. His nearest approach to the effect of originality is made by combining two or more periods of the past. Inventiveness in design is a faculty which, for the present, has been lost. Mode follows on the heels of mode, perspiringly; and in a very short space of time women are made to don the modes of half-a-dozen long periods; but never the mode of their own period: there is no such thing. In the days of Mademoiselle Pandore, women of fashion were dressed as no women in history—except, more or less, their mothers and grandmothers—had yet been dressed. They were content with that privilege, content with the little subsidiary changes that were vouchsafed from time to time. They never rebelled against Mademoiselle Pandore. Nor, for that matter, do they ever rebel against the Parisian mannequins who illustrate the will of the Parisian modistes exactly as Mademoiselle Pandore illustrated the King's. Why don't they rebel? It is well to obey a king—especially if he be a wise one. But what allegiance do women owe to modistes whose one aim is to get the utmost amount of money out of them by changing the fashion as often as possible? I suppose women obey the modistes by force of that inward restlessness of which I have spoken. It is a great pity. The fashion may happen to be, as it happens to be at the moment of writing, a fairly rational and becoming fashion, on the whole. (Belike this fashion will have been superseded before this article is printed.) But no fashion is rational and becoming for all women. The present fashion is fatal to the appearance of many women. It is a pity that they should all adopt it. For every woman there is some one particular mode of dress that suits her best—some one right mode for her. Having discovered by constant thought and experiment what that mode

is, she ought to adhere to it ever after, making only such differences in accessories as will prevent monotony without changing the essential form. The one plausible defence of fashion-following that I have ever heard is that the effect of uniformity has a charm of its own. Any one figure in the Parthenon frieze is beautiful, but not nearly so beautiful as the effect produced by the multiplicity of similar figures. Any one hospital nurse may be plain, but a group of hospital nurses is always a pretty sight. But we must remember that the draperies of the figures on the Parthenon frieze are lovely in themselves, and that the costume of a hospital nurse is in itself prettier than nine out of ten of the costumes evolved in blind haste by the Parisian modistes. A procession of fashionable ladies, at any average moment of fashion, is only less unsatisfactory to the eye than a single fashionable lady. And, after all, it is not woman's mission to form a pattern. It is the duty of every woman to be herself, and to make the very best of herself, in surface not less than in soul. Some women are claiming the right to vote, on the ground that they are perfectly well able to think for themselves. Well, one cannot see into a woman's brain, but one can see what she has got on. And her power of thinking for herself would be taken the more readily on trust if she proved that she could dress for herself.

Meanwhile, if fashion there must be, I wish the dominion of Mademoiselle Pandore could be reconstituted. For many years, the lady who is now queen in England has dressed, with but few modulations, in a fashion of her own. It is a fashion that would be disastrous to the appearance of many women. But it would be not half so disastrous as is the great majority of the innumerable fashions which these women now follow in the course of a very few years. The influence of English royalty today is potentially not less strong than the influence of French royalty in bygone times. It needs but to be exerted. I advise Mr. Abbot to offer his doll to Queen Alexandra, with an humble

petition that she insist that all the ladies of her court shall dress exactly according to this doll's costume as designed, and from time to time modified or amplified in this or that detail, by herself.

MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE FROM WITHOUT

July 10, 1909.

I HAVE often urged our dramatists to give the aristocracy a rest, and write plays about the class to which they themselves belong. An intimate and complete study of Mrs. Brown is of more account than the presentment of the Duchess of Hampshire as she is vaguely and respectfully supposed to be. In real life, doubtless, and as woman to woman, Mrs. Brown is at a disadvantage. Where is her tiara? Where are her electric and other cars? Her house has no courtyard, and on the inner walls hang no portraits of her husband's forbears by master hands. And, as against a battalion of powdered footmen, what is a house-parlourmaid? Mr. Robinson, Mr. Jones, and the other callers at Mrs. Brown's—how far less obviously exciting they are than the statesmen, the sportsmen, the diplomats, and the few carefully-selected millionaires, who surround Her Grace! I don't pretend not to be dazzled, even in this outer darkness, by the thought of them; and, if I were a dramatist, I daresay my plays would be exclusively about that exclusive world. Dazzled, blinded, I should trust inspiration to guide my reverent pen aright. The chances are that my confidence would be misplaced. Certainly, the average play about the aristocracy leaves me unconvinced of its truth. It *may* be all right, but I feel that it somehow isn't. That is why I have often wished that some aristocrat, or somebody whose life has been spent mainly among the aristocracy, would find time to write a play. For aught it might lack of technical merit, "connaissance de cause" would amply compensate us. My heart began to beat quickly, therefore, and my pulse throbbed, and my temperature

rose, when I heard that Mrs. George Cornwallis-West had written a play. We know that for many years she has been in the midst of the beau monde. She was the wife of one distinguished politician, and is the mother of a second. Also, her foreign birth must have tended to prevent her from taking her environment as a matter of course—must have kept her keenly alert and watchful, sensitive to impressions. Here, then, thought I, will be the play I have long looked for. Alas, I reckoned without the law of human discontent. The Olympian gods, whom struggling mortals envied their luminous repose, looked down and contemplated and were amused. But the Olympian mortals, whom we of the middle class envy, are envious of us. There is a magnificence about all things unknown. It is ever sweet to escape from one's own familiar knowledge, and let fancy go flying where it listeth. Strawberry-leaves and stars-and-garters, whispered secrets of high policy, all the paraphernalia that are so dear to the brooding heart of you and me, are as dust and sand to Mrs. Cornwallis-West. She swishes them aside and makes a bee-line for our abject selves.

Well, it is a proud moment for us. But we do wish, in the interest of dramatic art, and for general enlightenment, that "His Borrowed Plumes" had been a play about the sort of people the author really knows, and not about the sort of people she fondly imagines. At the very outset her ignorance betrays her. It was convenient to her purpose that she should get all her characters staying together under one roof. But here she was confronted by a grave difficulty. She remembered having heard or read somewhere that middle-class people don't have big country-houses in which to entertain their friends. "What," she wondered, "does a lady of the middle class do when she wishes to have a big house-party?" After prolonged thought, and after fruitless search under "M" and "C" in the Encyclopædia Britannica, it occurred to her that middle-class house-parties are probably given in riverside

hotels hired for the purpose. To make sure, she telephoned to some of her friends, who one and all assured her that it sounded likely enough. To us, however, the notion is more than a mild surprise, and strikes a key-note of fantasy that prepares us for surprises in store. The middle-class hostess, Mrs. Sumner by name, is a distinguished novelist. It is always rather difficult to believe any one of the characters in a play is really a great writer or painter, or excels in any other kind of art—except, possibly, in the art of acting. In reading a book, if the author has (as Mr. Henry James so pre-eminently has) an insight into the minds of creative artists, we can believe in the artistic achievements of this or that character: we can believe in the masterpieces that are hinted at. But when we see a well-known actor dabbing at a canvas on an easel, or complacently fingering a sheaf of MS., we do but smile. The dramatist may have a keen insight into the soul of a painter or writer; but we cannot be illuded by the actual presentment on the stage. I am afraid that not even in reading the script of "His Borrowed Plumes" should I be able to believe in Mrs. Sumner as a distinguished novelist. As a woman she is brave, affectionate, pure, self-sacrificing, what you will: a perfect "heroine", of a mould far more nobly heroinic, indeed, than is ever found in a member of the middle class; but at no point can a trace of the literary artist be detected in her. True, she does show something of the artist's pride and aloofness when Mr. Delaine, K.C., asks her to tell him the plot of her forthcoming book. She says she prefers to keep such things to herself. But she instantly relents when he asks her to show him the MS. "as a mark of confidence". This somewhat sinister phrase had prepared me, as a man of the world, to see Delaine instantly decamp with the lady's property. I wronged him. He merely adjusted a pince-nez, and, fifteen seconds later, having turned the pages with lightning rapidity, pronounced Mrs. Sumner's latest work to be her strongest, and predicted that it would be her greatest

success. Whether his literary judgment was as sure as his rapidity in mastering a brief, is a point which will never be cleared up. Fate, in her wisdom or her folly, ordained that the MS. should never be given to the world. One of the members of Mrs. Sumner's house-party was an adventuress, Mrs. Cranfield by name, a very wicked woman, but one to whom much might be forgiven because she was such an arrant fool. Mrs. Cornwallis-West may have met an adventuress or two in her time; and I daresay that adventuresses, when they come among the aristocracy, lose their heads and carry on in the strangest fashion. But Mrs. Cornwallis-West may take it from me that any adventuress who behaved among the middle class as Mrs. Cranfield behaves would presently find herself in a lunatic asylum. What other place would be fit to receive a lady who, sitting with a gentleman in the hall of a river-side hotel just after the other guests had gone to bed, and hearing this gentleman's wife approach, insisted on being shut into his bedroom, with a view to preserving her good name? Yet this is not the full measure of poor Mrs. Cranfield's madness. Major Sumner, whom she adores, is, like his wife, a writer. Only, his work does not amount to much. Mrs. Cranfield is struck by what seems to her a happy thought. Why not steal the typewritten scenario of Mrs. Sumner's book, read it carefully to herself, and then suggest it to the Major as the scenario for a play? Of course she will be presently found out, and her beloved will spurn her from him, and there will be the deuce to pay all round. But what of that? The adventuress nabs the scenario, and the Major writes the play. You would not expect that a cape-and-sword romance, written at second hand by a very mediocre writer who had never essayed a play before, would be accepted for production at the National Theatre. Mrs. Cornwallis-West, peering into the future, is convinced that such a thing might be. As she is an active supporter of the schemes for a National Theatre, this

conviction of hers is the more surprising. It is only fair to the Major to say that he himself is very much surprised. That he does not, however, describe the play to his wife until it has been accepted, is a lamentable proof of the distance he has drifted away from her. As soon as he does begin to tell her all about it, she sees what has happened. Rather than humiliate him, she holds her counsel and burns her MS. But she is not above a good strong scene with Mrs. Cranfield in private. Trust Mrs. Cranfield to have been fool enough to write blackmailing letters to a Frenchman, on the strength of which documents a confession is wrung from her by the K.C. And trust the Major to tell the enraptured first-night audience, in a soldierly and a gentlemanly fashion, that the author of the play is none other than his wife.

Now, from the standpoint of the average simple playgoer, "His Borrowed Plumes" is a very good entertainment. From the standpoint of the purely technical critic, it is a very good piece of work: a story conceived and set forth clearly, without halting, with a thorough grasp of dramatic form. From the standpoint of a critic who desires an illusion of real life, it does not pass muster. The characters have been sacrificed to the story. Now and again, as in the scene between the two jealous women, the characters emerge and are natural, real, and moving. There is much that rings true in the relations of Mrs. Cranfield and the Major. But, for the rest, Mrs. Cornwallis-West has let herself be led into the temptation that awaits every one who essays dramaturgy for the first time—the temptation to write not as a seer of life, but as a playgoer who knows all about the theatre. I conjure her not to bother, henceforth, about what she thinks is needed to make a good play, but rather to let her characters do just as they would in real life. Having, as she evidently has, an instinct for dramatic form, she need not fear for the result of this process. But of course she must select her characters from the milieu that

she knows. They must be the kind of people on whose behaviour she can regard herself as an authority. I daresay she thought that the strange things which happen in "His Borrowed Plumes" were really not less usual in the middle class than in the theatre. That is a notion which she must banish for ever from her mind.

AT THE GAIETY

October 30, 1909.

I AM elderly enough to have seen two or three of the old Gaiety burlesques, though I am young enough not to weep bitterly over the reminiscence—young enough not to feel that the Gaiety, as it is to-day, insults my heart. To me, indeed, the place's main charm seems to be in its abiding likeness to what it was in the dim past. What though "the Sacred Lamp" has been snuffed out, and the arc-lamp of musical comedy installed? What though the old walls have fallen, and others have arisen on their site? The spell has not been broken. The old traditions still linger. The spirit, the "note", is as it always was. The temple stands true to its name, and true to that special and peculiar sort of gaiety with which we have always associated it. What though the masterpieces of literature and drama be guyed no more there? Gone are the rhymed couplets, and the puns, and other things that are sweet in retrospect: what matter? These were but the trappings and gauds that the Muse was decked in. Soul and body, she is her same old self.

It is easy to recognise, hard to define, the "note" of the Gaiety. One reason why the place is irresistible is that nowhere else do we feel that we are so far away, and so harmlessly and elegantly far away, from the realities of life. We are translated into a sphere where the dwellers have nothing whatever to think about, and would be incapable of thought if there were need for it. Nothing jars there. All the people (except the ladies of the chorus, whose languor is part of the fun) are in the highest spirits, with no chance of a re-action, yet never in the extravagance of their joy

do they become loud, or infringe the bye-laws of deportment: they are all graceful and tuneful. They are all of them refined, though not in the least like "ladies" and "gentlemen" in actual life. They have a school, a higher school, of their own. Some of them are supposed to impersonate the aristocracy, others the proletariat; but in point of refinement there is nothing to choose between them: never a crude word or gesture. And all classes mingle on the easiest of terms. Every one wants every one else to have a good time, and tries to make everything easy and simple all round. This good time, as I need hardly say, is of a wholly sexual order. And yet every one, from the highest to the lowest, is thoroughly "good". The most attractive of the men do no harm to the ladies who love them at first sight. Not less instantaneous than theirs are the conquests made by the most unattractive men. A homuncule, made up to look as absurd as possible, has only to come by and wink at the bevy of lovely ladies to whom he is a perfect stranger, when behold! their arms are about his neck, their eyes devour him, they languish and coo over him, and will follow him to the world's end in deference to his wish for a good time. But be sure he will take no vile advantage. Absurd though he looks, he has his code of honour, like the rest, and never outsteps the bounds of that innocent libertinism which is the rule of Gaiety-land. Evil here is as remote as what we call propriety; and goodness and a good time go hand in hand. Gaiety-land is the Mohammedan paradise, reorganised on a perfectly respectable basis. Emotion is not more alien from its inhabitants than thought. True, there is always a thread of humdrum human love-story woven into the fabric of these plays. In "Our Miss Gibbs" there appears now and again a young man, with a Guards' riband round his straw hat, saying, in reference to Miss Gibbs, "I love her, and want to make her mine," quite soulfully. But who heeds him, or cares twopence whether the marriage will take place? In so far as we notice him at all.

we do but deplore that any one so cloddish should have strayed into this ethereal domain.

The fact that in these plays (being what they are, an appeal to our eyes and to our sense of fun) there is no hint of love except "pour le bon motif", is what most of all bewilders Frenchmen when they visit the Gaiety. They cannot understand how an entertainment of this kind can be kept going without more or less explicit ribaldry; and, when they return to their own shores, it is always the Gaiety that abides in their memory as the most amazing of all our amazing institutions. Also, they never can get over their surprise at the lightness, the vivacity, the exquisite technical accomplishment, of the chief performers. These qualities they had deemed to be inalienably Parisian. And certainly nowhere in London are they to be found in such high degree as at the Gaiety. They are in the air there—have been so since the time of Nellie Farren and Fred Leslie and Kate Vaughan. They are a tradition, handed down through James Lonnen and Lettie Lind. They admirably survive in Miss Gertie Millar, Mr. Edmund Payne, and Mr. George Grossmith. Miss Millar, though her charm is so distinctly original, is not, certainly, a born comedian; but she has achieved an exquisite style in comedy, of a kind precisely fitted to the tasks laid on it; and this, with her charm, is all-sufficient. One cannot imagine her at any theatre but the Gaiety, nor imagine the Gaiety without her. Mr. George Grossmith has brought his innate comedianship to a fine point now; and his singing and dancing are perfect of their kind. I am told that the song "Yip-i-yiddy-i-yay" was imported from America; it may have been; but as rendered by Mr. Grossmith it becomes a pure symbol of the very spirit of the Gaiety; monumental, in its airy way; banality raised to the sublime. Mr. Edmund Payne, by temperament and physique, belongs rather to the music-halls (where he would certainly have outshone all but Dan Leno). But he, too, has schooled himself in the

traditions of the Gaiety, and is a worthy *sociétaire*. All the minor parts in "Our Miss Gibbs" are played by people who have been carefully trained to produce the traditional effects. But, as always, the surpassing delight is the chorus. The look of cold surprise that overspreads the lovely faces of these ladies whenever they saunter on to the stage and, as it would seem, behold us for the first time, making us feel that we have taken rather a liberty in being there; the faintly cordial look that appears for the fraction of an instant in the eyes of one of them who happens to see a friend among us—a mere glance, but enough to make us all turn with servile gaze in the direction of the recipient; the splendid nonchalance of these queens, all so proud, so fatigued, all seeming to wonder why they were born, and born so beautiful. . . . I remember that when "The Belle of New York" was first produced in London every one prophesied that the example of that bright, hard-working, athletic American chorus would revolutionise the method of the chorus at the Gaiety. For a while, I think, there was a slight change—a slight semblance of modest effort. But the old local tradition soon resumed its sway, and will never be overthrown; and all the Tory in me rejoices.

MR. SHAW'S "DEBATE"

February 26, 1910.

VERY queer was its effect on me. As the evening wore on, the footlights receded, the audience vanished from around me, and though, far away, there the stage still was, with people talking on it, and with me over-hearing them quite distinctly, I felt nevertheless that it was Sunday morning, and that I was walking along Praed Street, with a keen and unremitting north-east wind against my face. Keenly, unremittingly, from the road unswept in deference to the Sabbath, the wind drove into my eyes and mouth and ears dry particles of refuse. Bits of trampled paper careered wildly past me along the gutters. Orange peel and wisps of straw danced unholy measures. For all the wind's violence, there was a faint odour of staleness everywhere. I pressed on, wondering if the wind would ever drop, wondering that it had not yet blown all the dust and other remnants past me. But these seemed to be unending, and the wind permanent. It was with intense relief that I espied a hansom, and jumped in. . . . Only as I was driving away from the Duke of York's Theatre did I realise that all this was a parable, and not a fact. . . . The keen and unremitting north-east wind is, of course, symbolic of Mr. Shaw's brain. The dust and other remnants stand for the staleness of the characters and the ideas which Mr. Shaw here fragmentarily reproduces from his past work (in which they were so fresh). And Praed Street on Sunday morning is my hint of the cheerlessness of that resurrection, and of its distressing unloveliness. Still the parable is not complete. It does not include the unreality, the remoteness from human truth, that pervades

the whole "debate". Let the fact that I never have been in Praed Street on Sunday morning stand for that.

There never was any reality in Mr. Shaw's typical young men and women. (I except Anne Whitfield, in whom—though she was certainly not, as Mr. Shaw claimed, "Everywoman"—there was humanity enough.) Mr. Shaw has often explained that the critics' scepticism is because they are steeped in the conventions of the theatre and can't recognise a real thing when they see it. Well, speaking for myself, I deny that charge. The "ingénue" and "juvenile lead" of old-fashioned commercial drama have never imposed on me. They never have seemed to me to resemble the actual young women and young men whom I have known. I see them as figments. And in that respect they do very closely resemble the young men and women of Mr. Shaw. The difference is that they are pretty figments. Mr. Shaw's are ugly. If a man invents, we prefer the result to be something better than life. We cannot understand a man taking the pains to invent something worse. In point of fact, a man never does consciously set himself that task. What he invents—however much worse it be than life—is either what he (by obliquity of vision) supposes life to be, or else what he would like it to be. Mr. Shaw's young men and women are the more distressing by reason of the fear lurking in us that—Impossible! Mr. Shaw is as distressed by his puppets as we are, and only by his righteous indignation against what he takes to be mankind is he enabled to go on with the task of fashioning them. When they were brand-new to us, their ugliness was atoned for by their brand-newness, and by the force and brilliancy with which they were presented. But now that we know them so well, and now that their creator just trots them perfunctorily out as figures in a debate that occasionally drifts into harlequinade and "knock-about", these alternately impudent and whining young men, and these invariably priggish and hectoring young women, all of them

as destitute of hearts as they are of manners, and all of them endowed with an equal measure of chilly sensuality, evoke in us a rather strong desire to see no more of them. Some comfort we take in our certainty that we shan't, at any rate, run up against them in the actual world. We are safe, for example, from meeting there Bentley Summerhays (son of Lord Summerhays), the first of the characters to confront us in "Misalliance." He is Mr. Shaw's notion of an intellectual but neurotic youth. His intellectuality consists in being rude to elder people; and the exact manner of his rudeness may be gauged from a typical remark to the man whose daughter he wishes to marry: "You're very full of beef to-day, aren't you, old boy?" Such is not the manner of any intellectual but neurotic youths whom I have met. But, as he showed in his portrayal of the poet in "Candida", and of the painter in "The Doctor's Dilemma", and of numerous other characters, Mr. Shaw cannot believe that young people, of what type soever, are not always making themselves offensive. Let it be granted that many young men are physically cowards. They are then all the more loth to give offence to people stronger than themselves. They do not, when they are left alone with such people, proceed to insult them till the moment comes for dodging behind the furniture and throwing themselves upon the carpet and shrieking for their sweethearts to come to the rescue. This, however, is what Bentley Summerhays does; and such, according to Mr. Shaw, is life; and any one who doubts it is "incorrigibly romantic". Let it be granted, again, that many young women find their homes and their inexperience irksome, and are restless and inquisitive. These young women don't, like Hypatia Tarleton (beloved of Bentley Summerhays), prate to the family circle about their desire for "adventures". Hypatia's father is master of a large emporium, and she suggests to him that shop-girls often have "adventures", and feels, as perhaps her creator feels, that she has scored. Of course she scores, in the approved Shavian

fashion, off the man whom, also in that fashion, she desires to trap into matrimony. "What," she asks him, "are you going to do?" "Bolt," he replies; and bolt through the window he does, pursued, in the approved Shavian fashion, by Hypatia. When she returns she has been kissed. The man tells her father that he will marry her if the settlements are handsome enough. The father consents; and there is the end of *that* little idyll. Not very life-like, is it? Nor a pleasing invention? The father, speaking of the young people of this generation, complains that they are all of them "hard and coarse, shallow and dirty-minded". So far as Mr. Shaw's young people are concerned, this is true. So far: no further.

I have said that these characters are perfunctory. Throughout the play, indeed, I had the impression that Mr. Shaw had not done his best—that the work had been thrown off in intervals snatched from lecturing and speech-making and organising this or that. I wished he would have more conscience in organising his own art. I do not mean to decry his present fashion of writing "debates" for the stage instead of plays. But a debate, to stand the test of the theatre, must be treated as an art-form. I must have some central point, and it must be progressive; must be about something, and lead to something. "Misalliance" is about anything and everything that has chanced to come into Mr. Shaw's head. It never progresses, it doesn't even revolve, it merely sprawls. Throughout the evening we are clutching at loose ends, all of which come off (though not in the slang sense); and we very soon grow weary of the pastime. So careless of his effects has Mr. Shaw been that he repeats not merely from his previous plays, but from within the play itself. Thus, after Summerhays has whined in fear of physical violence from one man, there is a City clerk who whines in fear of physical violence from another. And in the end we have Summerhays whining and collapsing once more. Intensely tedious, too, is the fun made out of the

difficulty of pronouncing the name of the female Russian acrobat who is introduced to reinforce Miss Tarleton as a proof of the Shavian doctrine that men are no match for women. Of course, there are many delightful lines, such as "I believe in morality. You just draw a line, and make other people toe it; that's morality." And there are lines that have that quality of quaint surprise which Mr. Shaw understands so well; as when John Tarleton says to the bank-clerk, his illegitimate son, who has come to shoot him and stands with levelled revolver, "I suppose you are out of work?" and the reply is "Oh, no. This is just my Saturday afternoon". But the fun of this scene is of a jarring kind. A few years ago, an eminent tradesman was shot dead by an hysterical young man who was his illegitimate son. The murderer then shot himself, but was nursed back to health with a view to the gallows. Public sentiment then stepped in, saying, "Don't rob us of this young life! Wouldn't twenty-five years' penal servitude meet the case?" So again the murderer was baulked of extinction, and, since he has been in prison, has made two other determined but unsuccessful attempts at suicide. One cannot imagine a more horrible story than this. It is too horrible to be a proper theme even for tragedy. Yet Mr. Shaw has sought to enliven his debate by presenting a farcical Whiteley and a farcical Rayner. Mr. Shaw is the most humane of men. And I take this scene in his play as a further proof of sheer carelessness. He must have just thrown it in without thinking.

To condemn a work of Mr. Shaw's is for me a new and disagreeable sensation. I wonder if the fault is really all his. It is a mistake to suppose that in the things of the mind we are less apt to be inconsistent than in other matters. We know that a man may love a woman sincerely, and yet for no apparent reason, gradually or suddenly, cease to love her. Not less in his opinions about art is he at the mercy of inscrutable change. He may love this or that work, and then, without being able to

give any satisfactory reason to himself, grow cold. Can it be that I . . . no! I have given very satisfactory reasons why I don't like "Misalliance" . . . Praed Street, Sunday morning, and a not bracing, a blighting, wind.

"JUSTICE"

March 5, 1910.

We are getting on. Time was when our drama was so utterly divorced from life that the critics never dreamed of condemning a play for artificiality. It is but a few years since they acquired the habit of judging plays in relation of life. And now (so fast has our drama been moving) they are beginning to decry plays on the ground that they are indistinguishable from life. Well, I am not going to join in the doubts expressed by so many critics whether "Justice", in the repertory at the Duke of York's, be proper art. "Cinematographic" they call it. So it is, in a sense. We really do, in seeing it, have the sensation of seeing reproduced exactly things that have happened in actual life. Or rather, we feel that we are seeing these things actually happen. If the cinematograph were chromatic and stereoscopic, and free from vibration, and gramophonic into the bargain, Mr. Galsworthy might—no, even then, as I shall presently show, he would not have a dangerous rival. In the first act of "Justice" we do not feel that we are seeing an accurate presentment of the humdrum of a lawyer's office: we are *in* a lawyer's office. The curtain rises on the second act; and presently we have forgotten the foot-lights, and are *in* a court of law. At a crucial moment in the cross-examination of a witness, somebody at the reporter's table drops a heavy book on the floor. An angry murmur of "Sh!" runs round the court, and we ourselves have joined in it. The jury retires to consider its verdict, and instantly throughout the court there is a buzz of conversation—aye, and throughout the auditorium, too: we are all of us, as it were,

honorary "supers". In the third act, we arrive at a prison. Gloomily producing a special pass sign "John Galsworthy", we are shown over the interior. We interview the governor, the chaplain, the doctor. Through the wire-blind of the governor's office we have, all the while, a blurred glimpse of certain automata, quickly-revolving—the convicts at exercise. Some of these men we see presently at closer quarters in their cells. We are haunted by it all afterwards as by an actual experience, not as by a tragic play. And part of this effect is due, of course, to the excellence of the stage-management and of the acting. But of what avail would these things be if the play itself were not true to life? At the game of producing an absolute illusion of reality a dramatist is heavily handicapped in competition with the cinematograph, undeveloped though that machine still is. What the cinematograph presents to us has happened, is ready-made. What the dramatist presents to us has not happened, has to be specially concocted. Only by constant observation of the surface of things, and by the intuitive sympathy with the soul of things, and then by a laborious process of selection and rejection, can the dramatist evoke in us that absolute illusion. For him there are no happy accidents. Every character must be an amalgam of many actual persons seen from without and within; and every incident must be relevant to these characters, and to the story told through them, and to the idea or ideas through them expressed. Especially such a play as "Justice", which is the vehicle for criticism of certain conditions of modern life, would be of no value whatsoever if the characters were not types, and if the story were not typical. I think that in "Justice", as in "Strife", it is because Mr. Galsworthy so carefully eschews any show of sympathy with one character, or of antipathy against another, that the charge of cinematography is preferred against him. In showing us a young criminal caught in the toils of the law, he shows us no hero, but a rather uninteresting youth with a tendency to hysteria, who does not, when he

is confronted with the cheque that he has forged, hesitate to let suspicion fall on an innocent colleague. There is nothing brutal or vindictive about the young man's employer: he lets the law take its course, but does so as a matter of principle, and reluctantly. In court, the counsel for the prosecution does not go beyond his duty; and the judge's summing-up is perfectly fair; and the sentence which he passes is according to his sense of duty to the commonweal. The governor of the prison is a very humane and sympathetic man. The chaplain is nothing worse than a prig. The doctor is not only conscientious but intelligent. Mr. Galsworthy never takes an unfair advantage. He dispenses with many quite fair advantages. Is this because he is merely a detached and dispassionate observer of life? The reason is the very contrary. It is because he is fulfilled with pity for the victims of a thing he vehemently hates, and because he is consumed with an anxiety to infect his fellow-men with this hatred and this pity, that he strives so unremittingly to be quite impartial. He knows that a suspicion of special pleading would jeopardise his case. He is determined to give us no chance of soothing our nerves by saying to him "Oh yes, no doubt there is a lot in what you say, but you have let your feelings—which do you great credit—run away with you". He doesn't mind losing the credit for having fine feelings and being regarded as merely a cold-hearted person who just wants to frighten and depress us, so long as he does succeed in his object of frightening and depressing us. He wants us to have to say "This is life"; and if we then round on him, saying "And you're a blooming cinematograph! Yah!" he takes our outburst as rather a compliment than otherwise. He sees that his object is achieved. That we should recognise the passion and the artistry in him is a matter of less importance.

In some of his works he does certainly lay himself open to a (very superficial) charge of inhumanity. In "Strife" he showed us a conflict, and in "Fraternity" a contrast, between the poor and

the rich; and the implicit moral of the play was that this conflict would be for ever. If things are irremediable, why, it might be asked, harrow us about them? To which, I take it, Mr. Galsworthy's answer would be that to recognise the sadness of things is a duty we owe to honesty, and is good for our souls. In "Justice", however, there is no fundamental pessimism. Mr. Galsworthy sees that our criminal law and our penal system are clumsy, mechanical, mischievous. But he sees them as things not beyond redemption. A little spurring of the scientific intelligence in us and of our common humanity is all that is needed to induce reform. Perfect justice there can never be, of course; but the folly and barbarism of our present method—which is far less barbarous and foolish now than it used to be—can be amended. Already it is a universal axiom that society's duty to the criminal lies not in avenging itself on him but in reforming him. Let practice be adjusted to theory. At present our practice is mainly in accord with a theory discredited. The method of solitary confinement, for example, is good merely as a torture. And it is against this particular part of our penal system that Mr. Galsworthy directs his strongest shafts. No one, nowadays, has a word in defence of solitary confinement. And I shall be surprised if Mr. Galsworthy has not delivered its death-blow. The cell-scene in the third act is, for purposes of horror, more effective than tomes of written words, however pungent. When the curtain falls, the auditorium is as silent as the very prison whose silence the convict has just broken by hammering with his fists against his door; and not even when, a moment later, the curtain rises, and we see Mr. Dennis Eadie cheerfully bowing his acknowledgments to us, is the horror undone. Cheerfully? No, I am very sure that Mr. Eadie is too fine an artist not to shudder at this rising of the curtain—this bland, idiotic attempt, on the part of the management, to undo the horror.

"THE MADRAS HOUSE"

March 19, 1910.

Two or three weeks ago, when I was depreciating Mr. Shaw's "Misalliance", I was careful not to say anything against his preference of a "debate" to a play in the ordinary sense of the word. But (if I remember rightly) I pleaded that a debate, to be effective on the stage, must have some sort of unity. In art you cannot do without form. Nor, for that matter, can you very well do without it in life. Suppose the debates in the House of Commons were conducted in the manner of Mr. Shaw's. Suppose that Mr. Lowther had been deposed from his chair, and that G. B. S. reigned in his stead. There would be no calling to order. Every member would be allowed to talk of whatever thing were uppermost in his head, without relevance to the set topic. Nay, there would be no set topic. Mr. Speaker would regard set topics as an old-fashioned method of crippling and sterilising the senate. Consequently, there could be no "winding-up" of the debate from the two front benches, and no "division". The debate would go on and on, the members revelling in their freedom, until Mr. Shaw, prevented by his office from talking himself, and bound by the same token to sit and listen with an air of polite interest, gradually pined away at his post and died there. There would be a certain poetic justice in that sombre conclusion to the proceedings. But the strangers in the gallery, as they filed out with bowed heads and noiseless footsteps, would not have for consolation the feeling that they had attended a memorable and useful debate.

On the other hand, any one who leaves the Duke of York's

Theatre after the third act of "The Madras House" will feel that he has derived an immense amount of amusement and instruction. For here is a debate that has unity. Mr. Granville Barker sticks to his theme. We know where we are. A steady flame burns for us, in place of mere showers of disappearing sparks. In the fourth act the flame still burns, but only in its socket, and dimly. The debate has gone on long enough, and what Mr. Barker has left over to the last is in itself of inferior interest. Thus your gratitude to him is like to be mitigated unless you depart immediately after the magnificent third act. Take this advice. I wish there had been somebody to advise *me*.

The unifying principle of the play is that the theme throughout is the present and the future of woman—woman regarded from various standpoints, moral, æsthetic, economic, and so on. There is no lack of men in the play, all of them sharply-differentiated types, but the main reason for their existence is not in the presentment of them as types, but in their typical contributions to the discussion of the theme. They are far out-numbered by the women. Some of these are elaborate studies, and with any amount to say for themselves; whilst others, such as the five unmarried daughters in the suburban home, and the three "mannequins" in the drapery shop, are as the chemicals which in certain experiments do but "act by their presence"—inobtrusive figures, yet philosophically significant, needed by the theme. Nor is it merely in theme that this debate coheres. Its manner is one throughout. In "Misalliance" Mr. Shaw constantly changes his manner for fear of boring us; as when he introduces an acrobat on an aeroplane. He makes his characters mostly comic in order to compensate us for the serious views they are to express. This is a manœuvre that defeats itself. We can listen with pleasure to the jests of serious people. (That is one of the reasons why Mr. Shaw achieved his great popularity.) But we cannot take clowns seriously. A clown straddling about with a red-hot poker is all very well,

in his way. But the clown at the lectern won't do at all. There is nothing specifically funny about the characters in "The Madras House". They are all a trifle exaggerated and simplified, so that their typical qualities be brought out and carried across the footlights. But this process is used no further than the art of the theatre rightly demands it. Every character in the play is a true study, made by a man with a lust for accurate observation, and with an immense talent for sympathy. Yes, perhaps it is not so much sympathy that Mr. Barker has as an immense talent for it. He is sympathetic through sheer force of intellect. So would Mr. Shaw be if he could (or, let us say, if he chose to) observe men and women accurately instead of inventing in some dark corner of his soul men and women with whom not all the concentrated forces of his intellect can make him sympathise. In "The Madras House" there is only one character that does not stand forth vital and salient; and this is the character of Philip Madras, the wise and good young man who is always in the right —always perspicacious, unselfish, and charitable by virtue of being himself so shadowy and cold. It is a note that pervades modern drama, this doctrine that human beings are always hopelessly in the wrong, and that only the inhuman ones can hope to be in the right. I don't say it is a false doctrine; but it certainly is a lugubrious one. And we must be pardoned for a certain measure of impatience with Philip Madras. Repressing our impulse to call him an impostor, and hailing him reverently as pope, we can't, even so, stand him—whether we feel we are in the right with him or in the wrong with the others.

And unluckily it is on him that the last act of the play mainly depends. We have already had many glimpses of his perspicacity, unselfishness, and charitableness; glimpses only. But now, so soon as the other characters, with the exception of Mrs. Philip, have taken leave of us, he asserts himself at great length. It is a very long, very quiet conversation that he has with his wife; and the

upshot of it is that the one chance for a man who hopes in this chaotic and evil world to preserve his self-respect, the one chance for him not to be crushed under the collapsing edifices of our jerry-built civilisation, is that he become a member of the London County Council. Slipped somewhere into the middle of the play, this discourse might be interesting enough, but it is not nearly interesting enough to be otherwise than a tedious anti-climax to the tensity of the first three acts. The first act is tense as a preparation, and as a picture—a picture of prosperous suburban life, a picture of Sunday afternoon in a large new drawing-room that commands a view of the Crystal Palace. Not all the drawings of Charles Keene could give us a firmer impression than Mr. Barker here gives us of typical middle-class life. It is as though we ourselves had spent Sunday afternoon in the bosom of the Huxtable family—nay, innumerable Sunday afternoons in the bosom of innumerable families like them. It is a stupendous synthesis. In the second act the venue is changed; we are away from the Misses Huxtable (though they haunt us), and from Mrs. Madras, the long-ago-deserted of Mr. Madras. There has been (as indicated in the first act) a scandal in the drapery shop of which Mr. Huxtable is chief proprietor. One of the female staff has been seduced. Mr. Huxtable has failed to handle the matter satisfactorily to himself: he has heard his voice "saying things" in which he didn't believe, though he believed on principle that they were the correct things to say. So now Mr. Philip Madras has been left to deal with the matter. On the one hand is Miss Chancellor, the overseer of the establishment, who holds the bitter conventional view. On the other, Mrs. Brigstock, wife of an employee who "lives in" —an excitable woman, who believes that she has cause for jealousy. Both women are admirably presented. But the principal study is that of Miss Yates, the delinquent—a capable young person, who does not in the least regret what she has done, and is, on the contrary, glad and proud of it, though her spiritual revolt

does not preclude passing doubts—"I suppose I am bad. Perhaps I deserve to 'go under'. I don't know!" From this particular study the play opens to general issues. The third act ranges at large over the whole position of woman in modern life. The discussion is carried on mainly by Constantine Madras (a convert to Mohammedanism) and Mr. Eustace Perrin State (a deeply sentimental American "hustler", with all the leisureliness of his kind; altogether the truest presentment of an American ever made by an Englishman, and acted with quite uncanny realism by Mr. Arthur Whitby). It is impossible to give any idea of the breadth and brilliancy of this scene. There is deeper and nimbler thought in it, and richer humour, than in any scene known to me in modern drama. I am impatient to possess it in a book. By this I do not mean that it has not on the stage certain qualities that it would lose in a library. It is thoroughly dramatic, by the contrast of the characters of the talkers; and the talkers are vivid characters who gain by being presented in actual flesh and blood. But their talk is too good for us not to want it in a form that can be held captive.

In praising "The Madras House" so highly after my disparagement of "Misalliance", I ought, in decency, not to forget how much Mr. Barker owes to Mr. Shaw. He was not, of course, created by Mr. Shaw; but deeply influenced he was and is. I hope he will now repay the debt by deeply influencing Mr. Shaw. Then I shall be as happy as the day is long.

"A FASHIONABLE TRAGEDIAN"

April 2, 1910.

If I had never read "Othello", nor ever seen it played, my visit to the Lyric Theatre last Wednesday evening would not have helped me towards appreciation of that masterpiece in tragic art. "Othello" is one thing; "Otello (Tragedia in Cinque Atti di W. Shakespeare)" is another; at least, for me. The Italian version may be quite worthy of the original. For aught I know, the translator—so far from being the usual "tradditore"—may have intensified the beauty and dignity of thought and language, and the fineness of characterisation, brought by "W. Shakespeare" to bear on the Italian novel which gave him the scheme of the play. Unluckily, I don't understand Italian—not even when it is spoken by Sicilians. (I wish I were any one of my colleagues in dramatic criticism.) Hoping that perhaps intuition might come to rescue my lack of learning, I listened to "Otello" with both ears pricked up unremittingly. My reward, at the end of the evening, was in having caught from time to time the words "io", "Otello", "basta", "tradditore", and "non", quite distinctly, and with a very shrewd guess at their meaning. I do not pretend I was not rather proud of this. "I was able to say grace for the temperate meal the gods had spread for me in the wilderness of my withered hopes." But there the wilderness was. The five words or so that I had understood—what were they as compared with the immensely copious vocabulary which Shakespeare used with such fine discrimination? Stripped of Shakespeare's language, and preserving (for me) merely the action and structure of "Othello" (the action syncopated, and the structure hacked

about, to suit the modern Italian taste, which I have no reason to suppose better in drama than it is in architecture, painting, and other arts), "Otello" seemed to me no better than a dismal throwback to the form which Shakespeare had transmuted. It came out as a tedious tale about a brave and good but incredibly stupid soldier who, by the machinations of a not very clever villain of the deepest dye, smothered his wife with a bed-pillow and presently cut his own throat. It came out as the sort of thing which, ruthlessly abbreviated, and transposed into modern life, would do very well at the Grand-Guignol. It did not come out as anything nearly related to a work of tragic art.

Is that a frown I can see on your brow, fashionable reader? a gleam of gathering wrath in your fine eyes? Have you been wondering why I did not begin this article with a wild whoop to the greater glory of Giovanni Grasso? And now is there surging in your breast—that once mild breast, now grown seemingly so fierce through your choice of so fierce an idol—a horrible suspicion that the whoop is not going to be uttered by me at all? I see your fingers twitching convulsively around the long Sicilian dagger which you bought in Wardour Street soon after Signor Grasso first appeared in London, two or three years ago. You glower fixedly at me, making very odd noises in your throat. O spare me, Sir, spare me! In the title-rôle Grasso was, of course, absolutely superb; not only did he look the part marvellously well, but by temperament and method he is absolutely fitted to play it.—But no, taking my courage in both hands, and relying on the chance that you are quite a mild person really (nay, taking your hankering after savagery to be an indication that you are very mild indeed), I confess that the foregoing sentence is not my own. I copied it out of the current number of a popular weekly newspaper. To me, when I went to the Lyric Theatre, it was *not* a matter of course that Grasso would be absolutely superb. I am somehow not at the mercy of those gusts of hysteria which

from time to time sweep over London. I was glad, but not mad, when Mafeking was relieved. And when Grasso on his first visit made London crazy I was as little impelled to acclaim him thereby the greatest of actors as I had been to acclaim Baden-Powell the greatest of soldiers. "Malia", the only play in which I saw him, was a play in which he had little chance of acting. I wrote here that he was distinguished in bearing, and that he might be, for aught I knew, a great tragedian; but I refused to confound with great tragic acting the contortions of Aguglia, who was at that time the leading lady, and on whom lay the whole burden of "Malia". When this article appeared, many of my most intimate acquaintances behaved quite coldly to me. They were disappointed in me. They had known that I had faults, but that blasphemy was one of these had never occurred to them. A little while, and the matter blew over, the wound was healed. On my way to the Lyric Theatre last Wednesday I was hoping the wound would not be re-opened. Such prejudice as I had was all in favour of Signor Grasso. Othello himself was not a more unwilling executioner than I am. "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!"

Othello was certainly a great animal; but not less certainly he was also a great gentleman—a knight, in whom simplicity was the reflection of a spirit noble and high. The animal side of his nature has been no more than suggested by such English actors as I have seen in the part. Signor Grasso certainly gives us the great animal for all it is worth; but in itself it is not, in relation to tragic art, worth very much. Only when it exists as a part of the great gentleman can the true Othello be shown to us. By Grasso the great gentleman is not (except in the scene of the council chamber) suggested. Physically, Grasso is greater than when he first visited England. He has—not to put too fine a point on it—grown rather stout. And this development, together with an odd mannerism in walking—a careful planting of the

feet and swaying of the elbows, supposed by our music-hall comedians to be characteristic of our costermongers—undoes that distinction of bearing which he signally had in "Malia". In the scene of the council chamber, where he stood quite still, draped in a white cloak, all was well. Spiritually not less than physically he suggested the Moor of Shakespeare, speaking his lines with the massive reserve appropriate to their meaning. And only when Desdemona appeared, and he, instead of merely not looking at her, shut his eyes tight and kept them so, in the manner of a child at hide-and-seek, did I begin to suspect that so soon as Othello was no longer on his best behaviour before the Doge he would be just a Sicilian "handful", splendid in point of vitality, no doubt, but nowhere on the plane of tragic significance. As I have said, I was unable to understand the words of the play; and it is possible that Signor Grasso's interpretation of them was as good as they deserved. But to regard him as from the English standpoint a passable Othello—let alone a "superb" one—is possible only to people who cannot distinguish tragedy from "knockabout". I don't disparage the latter art. All honour to Signor Grasso that when he threw Signor Campagno down on the stage, and stamped on him, it really did seem as though every bone in Signor Campagno's body must have been broken. But let not the public suppose that the thrills it derives from the stupendous and unlovely roarings and rampings and gruntings of Signor Grasso throughout the play are the thrills that we derive from the contemplation of tragedy. The public, not to be outdone by its hero, roars stupendously when this Othello, having bared his throat and gashed it slowly across with his knife, drags himself to the foot of Desdemona's bed and proceeds to "gargle" realistically. But let not the public suppose that its delight in sheer physical horror has anything to do with those emotions of pity and awe which are the tragedian's target. Strength Signor Grasso has. Dignity, a sense of beauty, intellect, he may have; but

there is no sign of them. Let us admire his strength. For the good of the theatrical profession, let us urge him to remain among us, another Eugen Sandow, willing to impart his secret to those who have need of it. But let us not make fools of ourselves about his alleged Othello.

HABIT

April 16, 1910.

Some writers have a dread of platitudes. I have not. What is a platitude but an expression of the wisdom of the ages, the synopsis of a theory that was long ago propounded, tested, established, never subverted? Truth, of course, is a delicate and many-sided affair. For every platitude there is at least one other platitude to dilute and qualify it. Thus, when we speak of ourselves as "creatures of habit", let us not forget to throw in something about "the charm of novelty". And never let our love of novelty break us of our wholesome habit of platitudinising. It is good fun to say quite a new thing—marred though the fun is by the certainty that our message has been delivered by forerunners, and forgotten by mankind, times out of number. To utter a quite old thing, to be the mouthpiece of sanctified and indisputable lore, is, or ought to be, an august gratification. When next you find a platitude on the tip of your tongue, do not slur it out apologetically. Examine it, test it, for the first time, maybe, with a fresh eye; steep yourself in the truth of it: rejoicing, you will then roll it off your tongue, in the manner it deserves.

"We are creatures of habit", for example. Perhaps you have never realised how deep this saying cuts. You are aware (though all due allowance be made for "the charm of novelty") that the oftener you do a thing that you like doing, the more you like doing it. I do not know what morning paper you read at breakfast; but certainly, if you have read that particular paper every morning for many years, it has acquired a hold on you that none of its contemporaries could now relax. I do not know what

is your method of reading it. My own newspaper I approach always through its outskirts, lightly lingering over the reviews of books on the one hand, and the law reports on the other, all the while listening to, but not obeying, the insistent call of the central page, which may or may not contain some tremendous piece of news to stir the very depths of my soul. Such is my procedure. Yours may be to envisage straightway the central page. Yours may be the better. There is no reason why I should not have acquired it in the first instance. But, if it were forced on me now, all the magic of my morning would be stripped away. The tobacco you smoke after breakfast may be better than mine. But, thank you, I prefer my own. The brand has deteriorated in quality since first I began to smoke it. But, while life lasts, allegiance will not waver. I know not which seat at which luncheon table in your club is preferred by you. Probably you could not justify your preference. Probably you would be puzzled to account for the various preferences that spangle your daily life. They are not of reason, but of habit. Opening the morning paper, lighting one's tobacco after breakfast, sitting down to luncheon—all these are pleasant functions. It is no wonder that the oftener we perform them, the higher we rate them, the closer we cling to them. Habit's signal triumph is in the power to endear to us even such things as are in themselves repellent.

I cull, at random, one simple illustration from the diary of my own days. What is more repellent than an oil-stove? Two or three years ago, in mid-winter, I went to spend a week in an ancient rustic inn. The proprietor conducted me to my bedroom. This was nobly panelled and had an ample Jacobean grate and hearth, to which I pointed admiringly, saying I should like the fire lit at once. The proprietory was very sorry: the chimney-pot had been blown off, and if the fire were lit the room would be full of smoke. He hoped the damage could be repaired to-morrow or next day; and meanwhile he would bring me a small

stove which gave out ample heat. This instrument—a sort of upstanding cylinder, freshly black-leaded—was promptly installed. It was a thing of mean, incongruous, and sinister aspect. It might have been a patent hive for black-beetles. Certain little bits of red and green glass inlaid in the top of it, for the purpose of cheeriness, especially annoyed me. It gave out very little heat. It filled the room with an unctuous, cloying odour. I hated and despised it. And yet, when, four days later, I came in from a long walk, and found, in the stove's stead, a beautiful big fire roaring in the grate, somehow I was stricken with a sense of loss. I had grown used to the little stove. It had had its faults. But which of us is perfect? It had done its best. So far as in it lay, it had served me well. And now it was gone. And it had never had one kind look from me. I realised, too late, the habit that had endeared it to me.

At the risk of being thought egoistic, I cull from the diary of my days another instance of habit's alchemy. Twelve long years, all but a short month or two, have elapsed since I became a dramatic critic. I had no desire to become one. "G. B. S." had just stepped aside: I found myself in his place, blinking. Had I been told that I was destined to write about plays for twelve weeks, I should have shuddered. Had I been told that I was destined to write about them for twelve years, I should have expired on the spot, neatly falsifying the prediction. But Fate weaves in darkness (which perhaps is why she weaves so badly), and it was not long before I acquired a vivid interest in the thing that, unbeknown to me, was going to take up so much of my time on this planet. Not that my pen ever ran away with me. I do not recall that I have once sat down eager to write, or that I have once written with ease and delight. But the cause of this lack was not in the nature of my theme. It was in myself. Writing has always been uphill work to me, mainly because I am cursed with an acute literary conscience. To seem to write with ease

and delight is one of the duties which a writer owes to his readers, to his art. And to contrive that effect involves very great skill and care: it is a matter of technique, a matter of construction partly, and partly of choice of words and cadences. There may be—I have never met one—writers who enjoy the act of writing; but without that technique their enjoyment will not be manifest. I may often have failed in my articles here, to disguise labour. But the effort to disguise it has always been loyally made. And thus it is that Thursday, the day chosen by me (as being the latest possible one) for writing my article, has for twelve years been regarded by me as the least pleasant day of the week. On Wednesday I have had always a certain sense of oppression, of misgiving, even of dread. On Friday—the danger past, the sun shining, my feet dancing! And yet (such is habit, and so subtle a thing the human organism), whenever I have let pass a Thursday I have felt uncomfortable, unsatisfied, throughout the day. Even during my annual holiday, away from England, when I have kept no count of the days of the week, I have always recognised Thursday by the vague feeling of inanition in me, of impatience—the sort of feeling a clock may have when it has not been wound up. And I am wondering now, as I write, just how I shall feel next Thursday, and on the Thursdays to come.

Last week Mr. Runciman wrote in this Review suggesting that we two should retire to a desert island and stay there until the respective vogues of Dr. Strauss and Signor Grasso had blown over. Very well: what island shall we go to? and what boat shall we sail by? I am quite ready. But I fear my comrade's is too belligerent a nature to tear itself away from the thick of the hurly-burly. I myself am not such a peace-at-any-price man as to be frightened away by Signor Grasso. Let no one suppose that the retreat I beat is not a dignified one. For some weeks I have been meaning to beat it; and now the hour happens to have come. And the reason for my resolve is not in any feeling that

I have said all that is in me to say about drama and acting. The reason is in a feeling that twelve years is a rather long time for any man to devote to the consideration of those two arts. So farewell, my readers! And farewell, my Thursdays!

Is love of my readers as strong in me as hatred of my Thursdays? It is not half so strong. I feel extraordinarily light and gay in writing this farewell—at least, I shall so soon as I have finished it. And yet (to return to the actual theme of my essay) habit is mighty; and habit, which made me mourn in retrospect that abhorred oil-stove, may yet make me envy my successor here. And you, by the same token, will miss me a little, for a little while? Ah, you don't know who my successor is.

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478 Sh.